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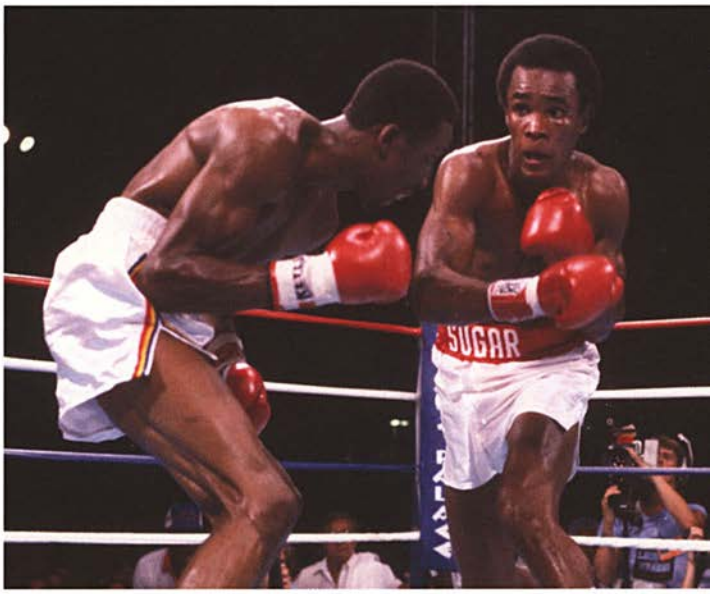

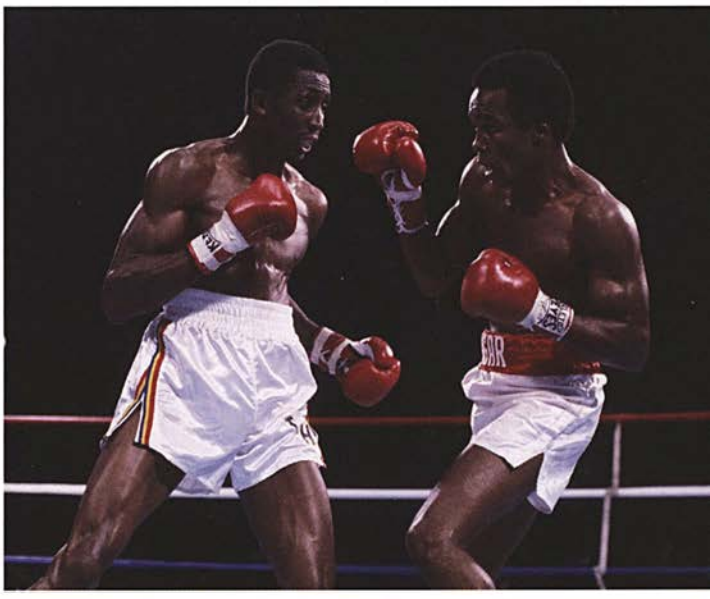

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IS IT THE END FOR MANNY PACQUIAO?

MYTHICAL MATCHUP: LISTON vs. FOREMAN

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Sugar Ray Leonard only had respect and admiration for Thomas Hearns following their epic welterweight championship showdown.

COVER PHOTOS BY FOCUS ON SPORT

OPENING SHOT

John Riel Casimero didn't land often during his WBO bantamweight title defense against Guillermo Rigondeaux, but unlike the elusive former 122-pound champ, he tried to make it a fight and was rewarded with a split-decision victory.

MICHEAL OWENS

NOTHING LEFT TO PROVE

Above all else, Manny Paquiao's performance against Yordenis Ugas was very good. He was active, tried to win the entire 12 rounds and never gave up. For a 42-year-old fighter, his hand speed was admirable. But that is the crux of the matter – he is 42 years old. And in this fight against a man seven years his junior, that age showed. Pacquiao threw a huge number of punches but connected at an extremely low percentage. And while Ugas deserves credit for being a fine defensive and intelligent boxer, a younger Pac-man would have found more ways to land his power shots.

It is hard to imagine Pacquiao fighting better against Ugas or anyone else at this stage of his life. His reflexes and foot movement were eroded from age and it is difficult to see them improving when he is a 43-year-old fighter, which he turns in December. That Pacquiao accepted the fight against Spence and then, on short notice, against an incredibly dangerous fighter in Ugas, showed us again that he is truly a class fighter. But at this stage of his career and life, the great Pac-man can no longer defeat these younger lions. His effort against Ugas was admirable, but it showed that the clock has caught up to him. While Ugas set himself up for big fights in the near future, it would be best to see Pacquiao call it a career. He left it all in the ring and his greatness is cemented regardless of this loss. It is time for Manny Pacquiao to enjoy the rewards of a Hall of Fame career and retire from the sport.

William K. Wolfrum
Uberlândia, Minas Gerais, Brazil

Manny Pacquiao should retire. He should have retired after Keith Thurman, but that being said, as a real fan of his and boxing, he alone can make that decision. How can you tell a winner, a champion to stop permanently with the life that he is known for and is in his DNA? He has given so much to boxing and his fists gave back so much to the world. It is sad that our idols will eventually grow old and have to stop, but Manny is what legends are made of. We wish, like with other great athletes before him, that he would never stop fighting, but all good things must come to an end. He should let go and we should let him go. Ride to the sunset and enjoy with your family and friends, Manny! You are the greatest in my eyes!

Bea Emma Bachinela

I will admit to letting my heart rule my head when Pacquiao vs. Spence was announced and sided with the Filipino phenomenon to defy the odds and turn back the hands of time. However, against the substitute Ugas, Father Time came calling and the 42-year-old Pacquiao had no option but to succumb to the reality that after 26 years and 72 fights, he was no longer the whirlwind of years gone by. The legs were so much heavier – always a sign of an aging fighter – the flurries that once so naturally appeared as a blur became forced, the head movement that took him out of harm's way was now a split second too slow. And Ugas exploited this in a thoroughly deserved victory. The plus side is that Pacquiao never took a beating and can hold his head high if this was indeed his final ring appearance. His astonishing achievements will very likely never be matched in the modern game. I can only thank him for being one of the most entertaining, exciting, record-breaking and most humble fighters I have seen in my 35 years of following the sport. Whatever he decides to do next, his place in history and legend are secure.

Dean Berks

★★★

I read in the August 2021 issue that Canelo Alvarez would be the first undisputed super middleweight champion in either the three- or four-belt era. I beg to differ in this department.

When Joe Calzaghe was due to fight Mikkel Kessler, Joe had the WBO and IBF belts while Mikkel held the WBC and WBA. Both were undefeated and were fighting for the Ring Magazine belt that Joe had won beating Jeff Lacy; this was the real fight for your belt and it proved that way. However, because Calzaghe wouldn't fight some taxi driver (Robert Stieglitz) the IBF wanted him to defend against, they stripped him of the belt just before the fight in Cardiff.

I believe Joe beat Mikkel before

the IBF belt he won off Jeff was contested, and as such he never lost it in a fight. So us in the U.K. and especially in Wales regard him as the first undisputed super middleweight.

On the cover of your magazine featuring this fight, Joe has three belts and Kessler two.

Glen Deadman
Wales, U.K.

EDITOR'S RESPONSE: Calzaghe vacated the IBF belt prior to his Ring/WBO defense against Peter Manfredo on April 7, 2007, which was seven months before his unification showdown with Kessler. However, Calzaghe still has the accomplishment of winning all four major sanctioning organization belts, plus the Ring Magazine title, which made him the true champion in the eyes of the world, not just the U.K.

In Italy, there is a lot of talk about the lack of revenge for Marvelous Marvin Hagler after the Sugar Ray Leonard fight. After Hagler's death, Leonard said in an interview that he couldn't help but concede the fight to him. Unfortunately, I have never heard Hagler's side. I would like to know if Leonard ever considered a rematch right after the match. As far as I know and from what we got in Italy, Leonard was not willing to give revenge until after several years! Can you give me some information?

Franco Mangiaracina
Fiumicino, Italy

EDITOR'S RESPONSE: Leonard announced that he was going back into retirement in May 1987, but he returned to challenge light heavyweight titleholder Donny Lalonde 18 months after that announcement. By that time, Hagler had settled into his own retirement. Leonard repeatedly floated the proposition of a rematch to Bob Arum a few years later, but by then Hagler's mantra to Arum and the boxing media, which often badgered him about a return bout, was "Tell Ray to get a life."

As a fan in the '80s and '90s, I always remember the IBF, WBA and the WBC as the three "major" belts a fighter could hold. If memory serves me correctly, the WBO was once considered a "minor" belt. When did it become a major belt, and I guess more importantly, why is it now a major belt? By the way, one belt for each division is perfectly fine by me!

Frank A. Costa

EDITOR'S RESPONSE: The WBO was founded in 1988 and was indeed considered a minor world title by much of the boxing media and public throughout the 1990s, but it gained some legitimacy in the U.S. when popular fighters, including Oscar De La Hoya and Riddick Bowe, won the belt in HBO-televised main events. However, the Puerto Rico-based sanctioning organization was still considered a minor belt even into the late 1990s/early 2000s, as Lennox Lewis was considered the undisputed heavyweight champion with his rematch victory over Evander Holyfield in 1999 without holding the WBO belt and Kostya Tszyu was considered the undisputed junior welterweight champion with his KO of Zab Judah in 2001 without holding the WBO belt. But by the mid-to-late 2000s most of the boxing world viewed the WBO as on par with the other three sanctioning organizations, in part because Bernard Hopkins, the long-reigning IBF titleholder who attained undisputed middleweight champion status by beating Felix Trinidad in 2001, unified The Ring/IBF/WBA/WBC titles with the WBO belt by stopping De La Hoya in 2004; and super middleweight standout Joe Calzaghe, who had held the WBO title for many years, beat the other 168-pound titleholders (Jeff Lacy and Mikkel Kessler) in 2006 and 2007.

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RINGSIDE BY DOUG FISCHER

BOXING AND THE WBA (WE'RE BUSINESS ASSOCIATES)

Networks invite controversy by wanting matchups like Fox-Maestre to be sanctioned by organizations like the WBA.

The boxing world has apparently had it with the World Boxing Association, if my Twitter timeline and YouTuber rants are any indication.

The dreadful verdict for a welterweight bout between Mykal Fox and Gabriel Maestre, which was televised live on FOX from The Armory in Minneapolis on August 7, was the final straw with the boxing public.

The WBA sanctioned the Premier Boxing Champions on FOX co-feature as an "interim" title bout. Neither Fox, a 25-year-old fringe contender coming off a decision loss to middling prospect Lucas Santamaria, nor Maestre, a 34-year-old former amateur standout with only three pro bouts under his belt, are rated by The Ring, ESPN, the Transnational Boxing Rankings or any ratings board with a clue. But the winner of Fox-Maestre would join Manny Pacquiao ("Champion in Recess"), Yordenis Ugas ("Super Champion"), Jamal James ("Champion") and Vergil Ortiz Jr. ("Gold Champ") as WBA "world" titleholders in the 147-pound division.

Fox, who dropped Maestre in Round 2 and clearly outboxed the aggressive Venezuelan for 12 rounds, should have been the winner. Had the right man won, all fans and media would've complained about was the WBA's audacity to have either fighter in its top 15 (Maestre was No. 4) and the insanity of having FIVE welterweight "champs."

But Maestre won a unanimous decision by official scores of 114-113, 115-112 and a gaudy 117-110 tally from Gloria Martinez Rizzo that were such blatant slaps across the face of reality that the stench of corruption nearly broke Boxing Twitter for several days.

Racist tweets from Rizzo that were uncovered and reposted (one of which referred to former first lady Michelle Obama as "monkey face") and the revelation that the WBA honored her as "female judge of the year" in 2019 added fuel to the social media firestorm.

I'm all for the outrage that fans

and media directed at the WBA. That collective condemnation created the necessary shame and pressure to force WBA president Gilberto Jesus Mendoza Jr. to suspend Rizzo, publicly admit that all three scorecards were awful, mandate a rematch and ask the Minnesota athletic commission to change the official result of Fox-Maestre to a No-Contest. As this magazine went to press, Mendoza announced that the WBA would do away with its interim titles and "Gold Champions."

These measures do not make up for the travesty of the original verdict or decades of shenanigans (the WBA has been irking me since they stripped Mike McCallum of their middleweight title before his showdown with James Toney in 1991), but it's a start.

Fans who urge The Ring and other boxing media to stop recognizing or mentioning the WBA in reports and rankings are missing the point. The WBA exists, and we need to be able to identify them by name if we're going to call them out on their bullshit.

Ignoring the WBA isn't going to make them go away. But proclaiming that they should be "kicked out" of the sport on social media or even during boxing broadcasts won't change a thing, either.

DAZN commentator Chris Mannix was applauded for ripping the WBA during the Roger Gutierrez-Rene Alvarado rubbermatch on the Vergil Ortiz Jr.- Egidijus Kavaliauskas undercard on August 14.

"The WBA belt that's on the line in this fight is one of 43 it has handed out across its 17 weight classes," Mannix said just before the junior lightweight bout began. "The relationship between sanctioning bodies and fighters, it should be symbiotic. The WBA's relationship with boxing is parasitic. They are fee-gobbling blood suckers that have done nothing but damage this sport, and until they clean it up, boxing would be a lot better if all the fighters holding WBA belts – including the winner of this one – throws those belts in the trash."

It was an excellent 32-second rant, but that ain't gonna happen. Gutierrez, who won his third bout with Alvarado by decision, was paid 10 times more than he made for his first tussle with Alvarado in an eight-rounder that topped a Golden Boy club show in 2017. Defending the "regular" WBA 130-pound belt that he won in their rematch in January is a major factor in that dramatic pay increase.

The next time Mannix – or any boxing writer or commentator – goes on a rant about the WBA, WBC, IBF or WBO, he should ask a promoter why fighters are paid so much more when a sanctioning body belt is on the line. The promoters will tell them it's because the networks want their boxing broadcasts to feature "championships."

The "symbiotic relationship" Mannix believes fighters should have with sanctioning organizations actually belongs to the managers and promoters, even though the sanctioning fee is taken from the fighter's purse. But it's managers and promoters that are familiar with the sanctioning bodies and must lobby to get their fighters ranked and certain fights to be sanctioned. They deal with the myriad regional titles and the travel expenses of sanctioning representatives because doing so pushes their clients closer to "world title" shots, and even "North American," "Continental Americas," and "Latino" belts will add luster to ordinary TV matchups and appease their broadcast partners.

Bottom line: The networks empower the sanctioning organizations.

The networks want title bouts, promoters need TV (they aren't power brokers in this rough and wild sport without the license fees and exposure from major broadcast partners), and the fighters need managers and promoters to climb the rankings to the coveted belts, which earn them significant paydays.

They're all connected, they're all in business, and no matter what Mendoza promises, they're not going to let bad press and a Twitter shitstorm get in the way of their money.

KEVIN ESTRADA/GOLDEN BOY

The WBA sucks, but it helps pugs like Roger Gutierrez (right) get paid.

By no means is this column meant to defend the WBA or criticize those who criticize the sanctioning organizations.

I think the rants of the anti-sanctioning body crusaders has been a good thing, even though it's somewhat misdirected.

I could go on my own rant about U.S. networks (with the exception of DAZN) ignoring or marginalizing the Ring championship while playing up sanctioning body belts in PR materials, social media posts and shoulder programming, as well as fighter introductions and on-air commentary (shout out to Brian Kenny, who always mentions Ring titles on FOX broadcasts, and to Top Rank host and ring announcer Mark Shunock, who does the same on ESPN). I might save that for another column.

This one is about the connection between the networks and the belts, and the fact that the WBA is part of boxing's economic infrastructure. The Panama-based sanctioning body (and its three brother organizations) are here to stay as long as the industry believes it needs them.

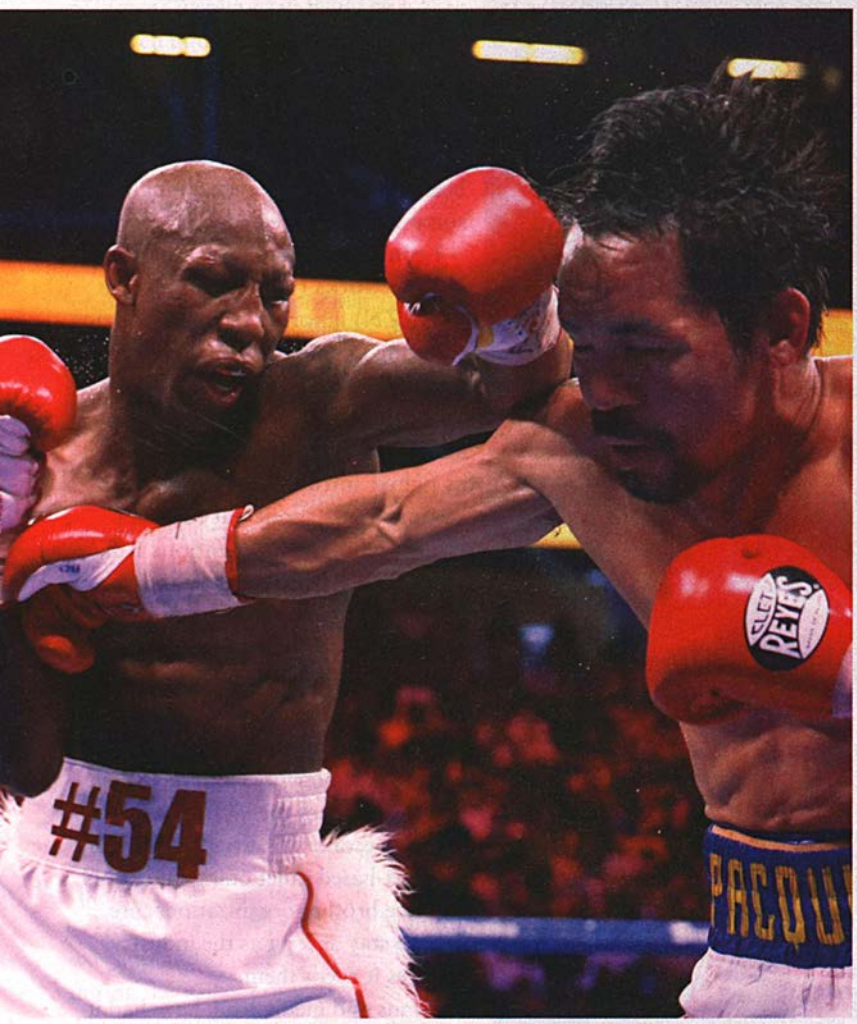
If fans and media truly have had it with the alphabet belts, they need to redirect some of that energy normally reserved for sanctioning organization scorn. They need to tell the networks to put a premium on matchups, not "world championships." Networks need to know that fans are more interested in quality matchmaking and entertaining fights than belts.

Until this happens, nothing will change. Promoters will continue to serve up sub-par matchups for bogus world titles, which will sometimes result in the kind of egregious controversy we witnessed on August 7. Business as usual.

I only feel bad for Fox (the fighter, not the network).

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH

BY TOM GRAY



Manny Pacquiao tried his best against Yordenis Ugas, but the Cuban's size and skill was too much for the aging legend.

YORDENIS UGAS

When Yordenis Ugas replaced an injured Errol Spence Jr. as Manny Pacquiao's August 21 opponent in Las Vegas, the prevailing wisdom among fans, experts and oddsmakers was that the legendary Filipino had been handed an easier – a much easier – mission.

Ugas (27-4, 12 KOs) hadn't read the script.

The Cuban star entered the ring as the defending WBA welterweight titleholder and carried the swagger of a champion. Ugas had been scheduled to appear on the Pacquiao-Spence undercard, so despite accepting the Pacquiao assignment at just 11 days' notice, he was piping fit and fully motivated for the opportunity of a lifetime.

This was his chance to knock off arguably the greatest fighter of a generation.

From the opening bell, the 35-year-old Ugas stuck to the basics. Pacquiao would attempt to unleash the signature bursts that have perplexed and punished scores of dangerous opponents down the years, and Ugas would simply pop out the jab or a one-two and stop him dead in his tracks.

Having claimed Olympic bronze and world championship gold in a storied amateur career, Ugas has seen pretty much everything there is to see in his boxing journey. A 42-year-old version of Pacquiao, who was three-and-a-half inches shorter and over two years out of the ring, was not to be feared.

The bout was competitive early, but Ugas pulled away in the second half. Pacquiao was fresh out of miracles. The great Filipino's legs looked heavy and he was unable to create the angles that would allow him to punch when his opponent was out of position. Instead, he trudged forward in straight lines and caught punch after punch.

Pacquiao (62-8-2, 39 KOs) has been such a wonderful ambassador for the sport that his athletic obituary was always going to overshadow Ugas' greatest-ever triumph. After all, legends die hard.

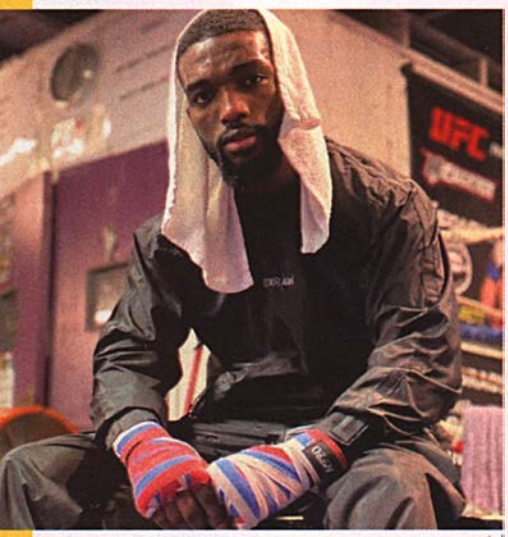
"I've been living under Manny's shadow for a year," Ugas said at the post-fight press conference. "Now we fought in the ring to find out who the champion is. We decided it in the ring.

"Manny is a great legend, a great fighter. If he wants a rematch, no question about it, a legend like that deserves it."

What this great former champion deserves now is a prosperous and peaceful retirement.

NEW FACES: FRANK MARTIN

By **Anson Wainwright**



AGE: 26
HOMETOWN: Indianapolis, Indiana
WEIGHT CLASS: lightweight
HEIGHT/REACH: 5-foot-8 (173 cm) / 68 inches (173 cm)
AMATEUR RECORD: 52-6
TURNED PRO: 2017
PRO RECORD: 14-0 (10 knockouts)
TRAINER: Derrick James
MANAGER: No manager
PROMOTER: Man Down Promotions
INSTAGRAM: @frankmartin.2016

BEST NIGHT OF PRO CAREER AND WHY: Martin is most happy with his seventh-round knockout of the previously unbeaten (13-0) Jerry Perez in what was regarded as a step-up fight in April.

"I did everything in the game plan we worked on," Martin told The Ring. "Everything I was hearing in the corner was working for me. I was just on that night.

"I saw everything that night. My body was reacting the way I needed to. I was strong, I was fast. That was my best performance."

WORST NIGHT OF PRO CAREER AND WHY: "I feel like every performance from fight one, I've improved," he said. "I haven't had any fights that I felt I didn't improve or I did worse than my last fight.

"I actually feel every fight since I turned professional, I've seen improvements."

WHY HE'S A PROSPECT: The highlight of Martin's amateur career came when he claimed gold at the 2016 National Golden Gloves.

He has sparred with several fringe contenders, but it is his work with Gervonta Davis that was particularly noteworthy.

"It was a good experience," said Martin. "There really wasn't a lot of separation as far as our skill set, power, speed – there wasn't nothing I can't handle."

The southpaw is also inspired by regular interaction with unified welterweight titleholder Errol Spence Jr.

"It motivates me to be around him. Back home in Indiana, I had nobody to look at for certain things," Martin explained. "With Errol, seeing how hard he works, knowing where he is right now and the work he puts in – he's always in the gym. He's disciplined. It's opened my eyes. You've got to stay in the gym, stay active.

"I've been training with Derrick [James] for my last three fights. His training has taken my game to a whole other level."

Renowned boxing trainer Joe Goossen, famed for his work with, among others, Michael Nunn and the Ruelas brothers, Rafael and Gabriel, worked the Fox Sports broadcast for Martin's win over Perez and was positively glowing in his assessment of the young fighter.

"He's focused, he's single-minded, he understands what he needs to do and what he's going to do," said Goossen. "He's one of those guys that is built for this sport physically, mentally, spiritually, without a doubt.

"He's very cunning in the ring and a very explosive, short puncher. When he gets in close, you're not going to have a lot of time to try to time his stuff, because it's so abrupt, to the point – so short that he gets you before you can get to him. It takes years, if ever, that guys can figure out how to punch so efficiently and so short when they're in close.

"In the right circumstances, he could win a world title tomorrow. Even though he could beat a lot of those guys, in another 10 fights, his Rolodex is going to be filled with little nuances that he's going to learn about the pro game. The difference is he'll win the title even more easily and explosively when you get that background."

WHY HE'S A SUSPECT: Goossen was so impressed by what he saw from Martin that he feels there is no significant weakness that has shown up in his game at this stage.

"Some guys, they're almost flawless," said Goossen. "It'll probably take another extraordinary fighter to maybe expose some of his minor flaws. Against guys he's fighting right now that are good fighters, nobody is going to expose him at this level.

"By the time he gets there, [Vasiliy] Lomachenko will be gone, Lopez will be gone, Haney will probably be gone. I'm hard-pressed to find even one flaw that is glaring at all – I mean it."

Martin knows from his time with Spence that he can't rest on his laurels and must improve across the board.

STORYLINES: Martin was the youngest born of five children in Detroit. However, his parents weren't together, so he spent time between Detroit and Fort Wayne, Indiana.

"We were raised pretty well," he said. "My dad was always trying to keep me out of trouble. Once I moved to Fort Wayne with my mom, trouble was just finding me."

He moved to Indianapolis and initially played football and wrestled before finding boxing at 18. After getting into trouble in his senior year, Martin lost his scholarship, which forced him to double down on his boxing endeavors.

"I just told myself I'm getting into boxing and put my all into it," he said. "I know if I put my all into it, I'll be able to do something with it."

He enjoys going to the gun range, cooking and watching football. He's a fan of the Dallas Cowboys, for whom his cousin Jaylon Smith is a linebacker.

Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright.

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JABS AND STRAIGHT WRITES

BY THOMAS HAUSER

BODY AND SOUL: THE STORY BEHIND A BOXING CLASSIC

***Body and Soul* is on the short list of greatest** boxing movies of all time, and deservedly so. It's a wonderful film, worthy of the accolades it has received over the years. John Garfield was the driving force behind it.

Jacob Garfinkle was born in 1913 to Russian Jewish immigrants who lived on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. His mother died when he was 7, and he grew up being cared for by a succession of relatives in Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx. A poor student and chronic truant, he joined gangs in whatever neighborhood he lived in. A bout with scarlet fever when he was a boy caused permanent damage to his heart.

Garfinkle became interested in acting as an adolescent, began his career as an actor in live theater and in 1938 signed a film contract with Warner Brothers (which insisted he change his name to the less ethnic-sounding John Garfield). As Bernard Weintraub wrote in The New York Times, "He was one of the first dark-haired, working-class, ethnic outsiders to turn into a Hollywood star. His chip-on-the-shoulder style and his rugged looks often cast him as a social outsider on the screen: a boxer, a gangster, a soldier. The persona affected actors from the 1950s onward."

Garfield is often cited as a predecessor of Method actors like Marlon Brando, James Dean and Robert De Niro. Many of his films, such as *Gentleman's Agreement* and *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, are widely regarded as classics. Subpoenaed in 1951 to testify before the United States House of Representatives Committee on Un-American Activities that was investigating "communism in Hollywood," he refused to "name names." That refusal damaged his film career.

It should also be noted that Garfield turned down the male lead in the 1947 Broadway production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, after which the role went to Brando. More tragically, the role of Terry Malloy in *On The Waterfront* was earmarked for Garfield but he died before production began. Again, Brando stepped into the void.

Unlike most actors, Garfield could actually fight a bit. Growing up, he was often in street fights, sparred at a gym on Jerome Avenue in the Bronx and, according to several biographical profiles, reached the semifinals of a New York City Golden Gloves tournament. That brings us to *Body and Soul*.

In 1947, Garfield chose to not renew his contract with Warner Brothers and instead founded an independent production company with producer John Roberts. *Body and Soul* was their first film together. Initially, it was planned as a biopic of former world champion Barney Ross. But when Ross's heroin addiction (a consequence of being treated with morphine for wounds suffered in World War II) became public knowledge, a Ross biopic became commercially unviable and a new script was written by Abraham Polonsky.

Body and Soul is a dramatic exploration of the corrupt underside of boxing. Garfield plays middleweight fighter Charley Davis. Lilli Palmer is cast as Peg (Charley's love interest), while Hazel Brooks is Alice (the conniving other woman). Anne Revere is effective as Charley's mother. There are two particularly loathsome characters – Quinn (a small-time promoter played by Robert Conrad) and Roberts (a mob boss played by Lloyd Gough).

Normally, as per the custom of the time, a white actor would have been cast in the role of Ben Chaplin (the champion who Charley dethrones early in the narrative). But Garfield insisted that the role go to

Actors John Garfield (left) and Art Dorrell in 1947's *Body and Soul*.

Canada Lee (a 40-year-old Black actor who had fought professionally and compiled a 39-35-10 record before retiring in 1933).

Body and Soul piles double-crosses on top of double-crosses. At one point, Charley (who has reluctantly agreed to throw a fight) tells Roberts, "I still think I could knock that Marlowe on his ear in two rounds."

"Maybe you could, Charley," the mob boss answers. "But the smart money is against it. And you're smart . . . You gotta be businesslike, Charley. And businessmen have to keep their agreements."

Later, when things get more antagonistic between them, Charley asks Roberts rhetorically, "What are you gonna do? Kill me? Everybody dies."

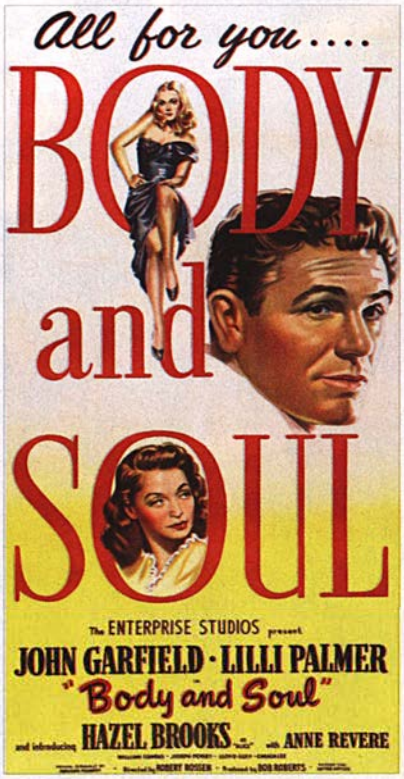
Body and Soul was criticized in some circles as a "socialist morality drama" that branded the pursuit of money by the powers that be as corrupting society to the detriment of working-class men and women. It also led to increased government scrutiny of Garfield.

Garfield and his wife had three children. His daughter Julie is the only one alive today. Julie followed in her father's footsteps as an actor, appearing onstage with luminaries like Zero Mostel and George C. Scott. She also won a Variety Drama Critics Award for her performance as Sonya in the 1971 production of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* at the Roundabout Theatre in New York.

"*Body and Soul* is my favorite of the movies my father made," Julie says, "because of the character transformation that Charley undergoes and because the message of the film is so much in keeping with my father's real-life beliefs. It's about learning how to live in this world and be successful without selling out."

Julie was six when her father died.

"There's an incident my mother told me about years later," she recalls. "I was too young to understand it at the time. Canada Lee was dying, and my father drove up to Harlem to visit him. They had become friends. And the FBI trailed my father the entire way. When my father got out of his car in Harlem, the FBI agents got out of their car to see where he was going. He confronted them and said something like, 'What's wrong with you? My friend is dying. Can't I visit him one last time without this?'"



Canada Lee died on May 9, 1952.

Two weeks later, at age 39, Garfield died from a sudden heart attack. "No actor can be really good until he's reached 40," he had once said.

More than 10,000 mourners lined the streets on the day of Garfield's funeral. It was the largest crowd at a celebrity funeral in New York since Rudolph Valentino's death in 1926.

★★★

When Tommy Lasorda died earlier this year, most obituaries referenced the fact that, just before his death, Lasorda was the oldest living member of the Baseball Hall of Fame. That got me thinking about boxing. So with thanks to Jeff Brophy, who compiled the following information, here are some numbers.

As summer 2021 began, the oldest living member of the International Boxing Hall of Fame at Canastota was British promoter Jarvis Astaire, who was born on October 6, 1923. Trailblazing female boxer Barbara Buttrick (December 3, 1929) was in the number two spot followed by "the dean of American sportswriters," Jerry Izenberg (September 10, 1930), and the great Larry Merchant (February 11, 1931). Next comes ring judge and sanctioning body official Guy Jutras (March 22, 1931).

After that?

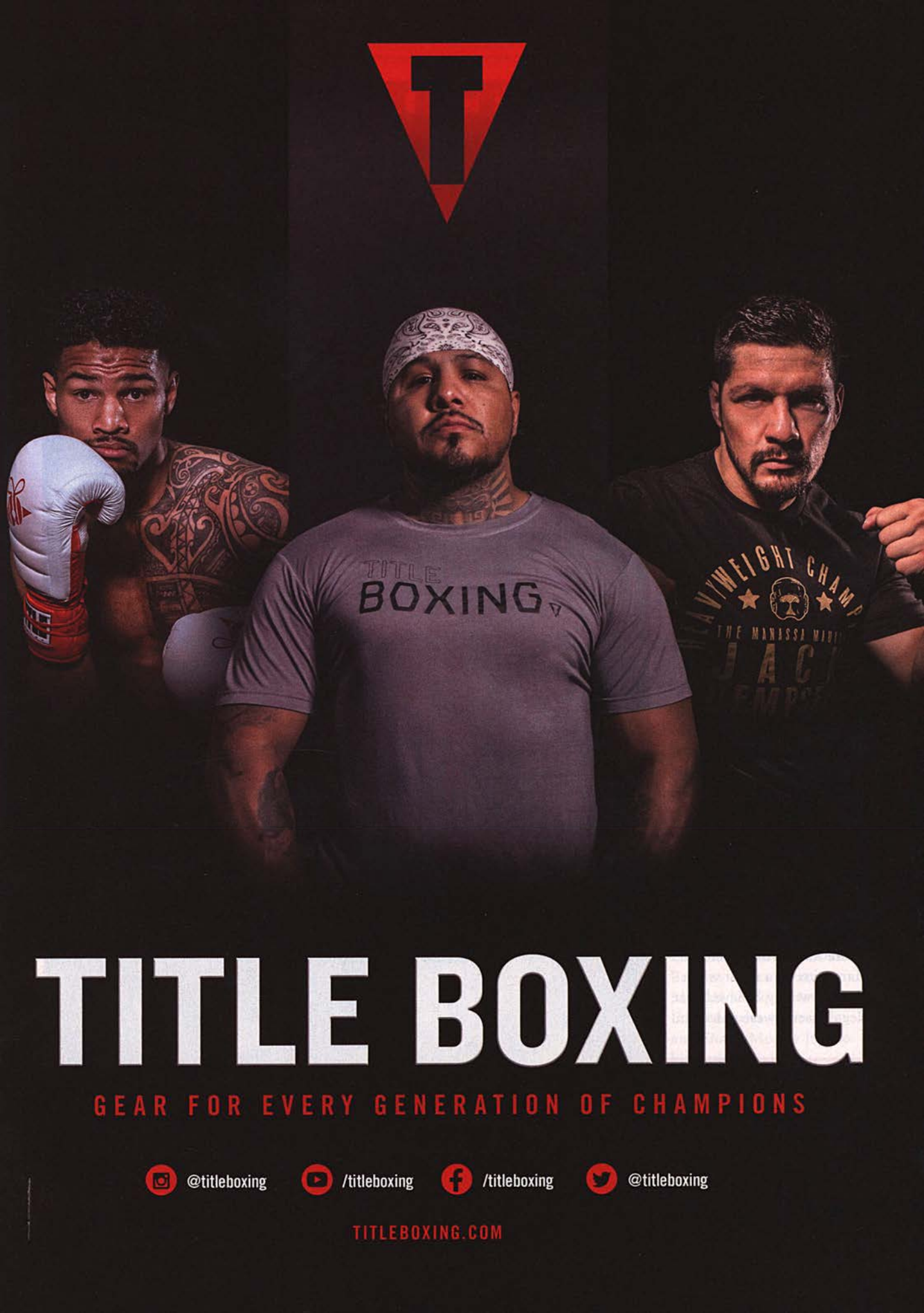
Promoter Don Elbaum's date of birth is a closely guarded secret. But the Hall of Fame lists it as June 16, 1931. Next comes Don King (August 20, 1931) followed by Bob Arum (December 8, 1931).

The oldest living male fighters in the Hall of Fame as of this writing are Tony DeMarco (January 14, 1932), Eder Jofre (March 26, 1936), Carlos Ortiz (September 9, 1936) and Nino Benvenuti (April 26, 1938).

The youngest inductee in any category is Andre Ward (February 23, 1984).

Time is fleeting. It's the nature of living that this list will change. As of this writing, there are 125 living inductees in the International Boxing Hall of Fame. I'm one of them. Thirty-eight of the inductees are older than I am. Eighty-six are younger. I guess that means I'm getting old.

Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com. His next book – Broken Dreams: Another Year Inside Boxing – *will be published by the University of Arkansas Press this autumn. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism. In 2019, he was selected for boxing's highest honor – induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.*



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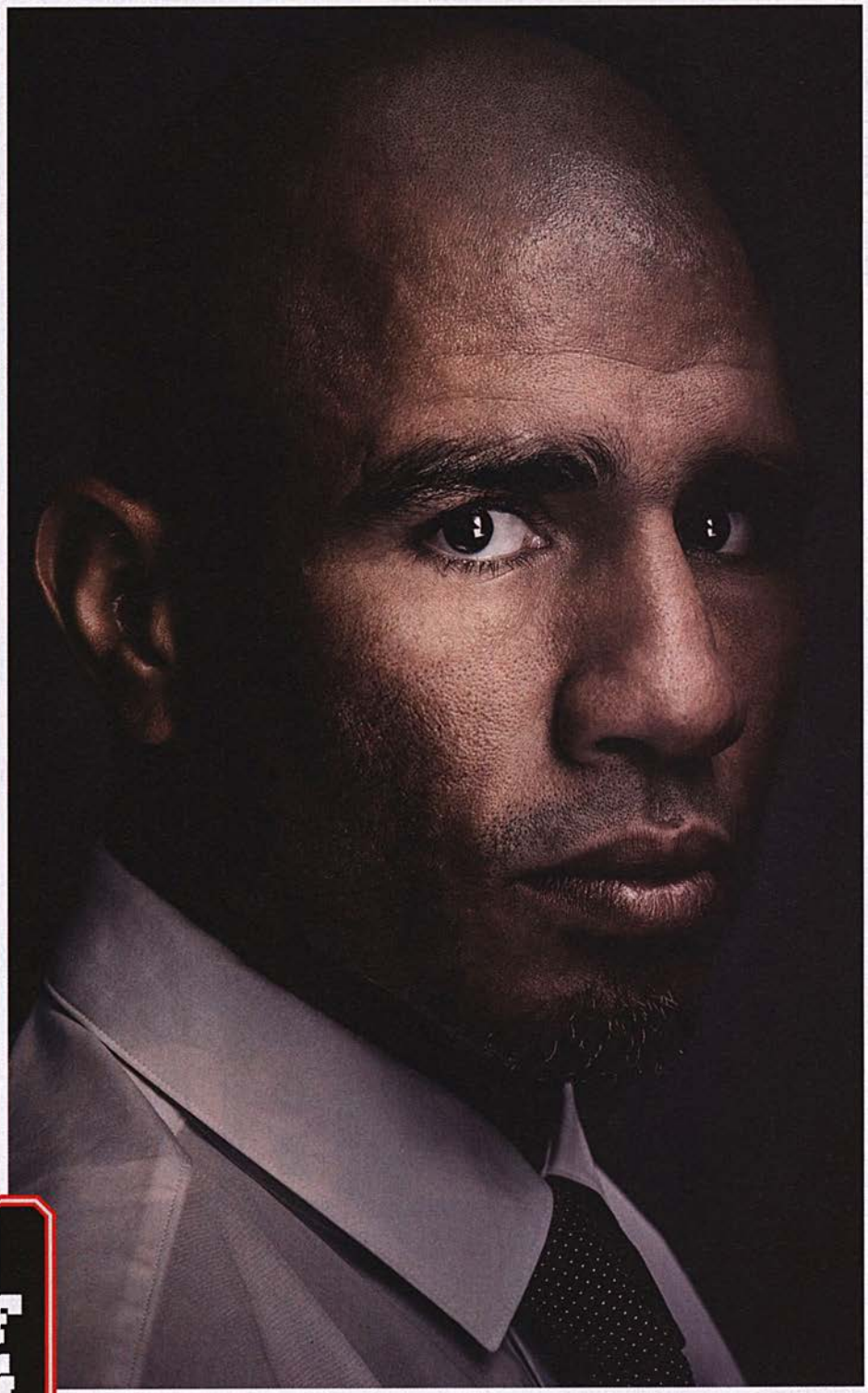
WAITING THEIR TURN AT CANASTOTA

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **WOJTEK URBANEK** • TEXT BY **THOMAS HAUSER**

Induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in Canastota is boxing's highest honor. Inductees fit into one of seven categories. "Modern" – which includes male boxers whose final fight was no earlier than 1989 – is the most watched category. To be eligible, a fighter must have been retired for at least three years.

The electors charged with selecting the "modern" inductees for the Class of 2021 were faced with an unusually strong group of first-time candidates. Floyd Mayweather Jr., Andre Ward and Wladimir Klitschko were chosen. But there were other first-time candidates on the ballot who would have been selected in most years and are likely to be inducted into the Hall of Fame in the future. Miguel Cotto and Tim Bradley are among them.

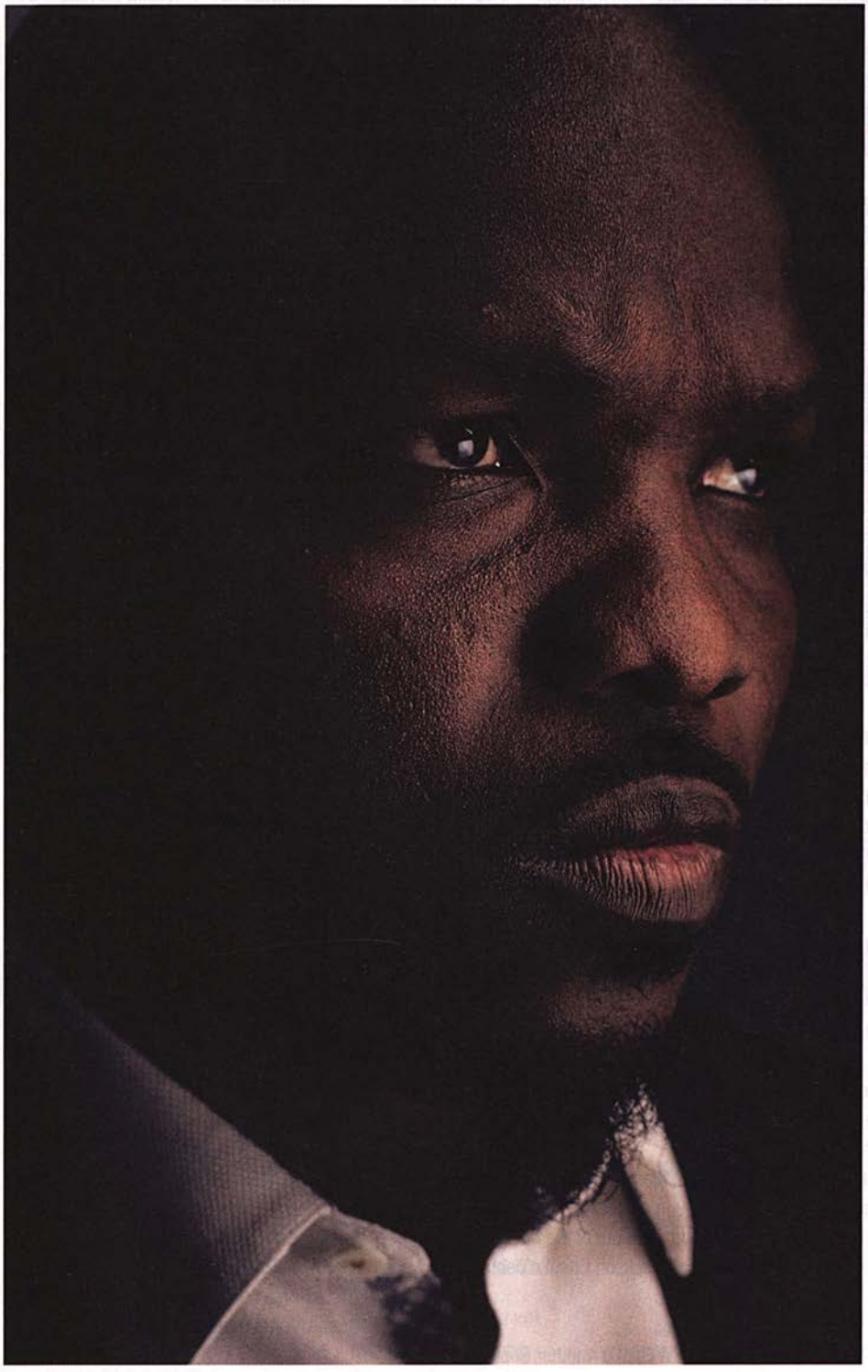
Cotto turned pro in 2001 and won world titles at weights ranging from 140 to 160 pounds. He was undefeated in 32 bouts before losing to Antonio Margarito on a night when it's now widely believed that illegal inserts were placed in



MIGUEL COTTO

THE FACE OF BOXING

TIM BRADLEY



There was a time when Tim Bradley was the best 140-pound fighter in the world. In 2008, he journeyed to England to fight Junior Witter and claimed the WBC junior welterweight crown. Successful defenses against Edner Cherry, Kendall Holt, Nate Campbell and Lamont Peterson followed. Then Bradley dominated Devon Alexander in a much-anticipated title-unification bout and knocked out Joel Casamayor.

That set the stage for Bradley vs. Manny Pacquiao for the WBO welterweight crown. It was a close fight. Bradley won a split decision that ran against the economic interests of the powers that be in boxing. And all hell broke loose. Undeterred, Bradley decisioned Ruslan Provodnikov and Juan Manuel Marquez in his next two fights before losing a decision in a rematch against Pacquiao (who defeated Tim again in a rubber match). Those were the only two losses in Bradley's ring career.

Losing to Manny Pacquiao is no disgrace. Hall of Famers Oscar De La Hoya, Marco Antonio Barrera (twice), Juan Manuel Marquez (twice), Erik Morales (twice) and Shane Mosley lost to him too.

Cotto and Bradley deserve enshrinement in Canastota based on their ring accomplishments. They're also men of dignity and grace who brought honor to boxing outside the ring.

Margarito's handwraps. Three years later, Cotto stopped Margarito in nine rounds.

Miguel was always willing to go in tough. Three of his six career losses came against Manny Pacquiao, Mayweather and Canelo Alvarez in their prime. His victims included Sergio Martinez, Shane Mosley and Zab Judah.

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RATINGS

SUMMARY ★ ANALYSIS

The Ring Ratings through fights of August 21, 2021

RECENT FIGHT RESULTS AND CHANGES IN THE RING'S DIVISIONAL RANKINGS BY BRIAN HARTY

Ortiz vs. Mean Machine

In the old days, it was The Ring's policy to mark a fighter for deletion from the ratings after one year of inactivity. But when fights that had been scheduled in the pre-pandemic world were canceled wholesale and boxing went into lockdown for a few months, only tentatively reemerging inside cheerless bubbles staffed by disinfection crews, we decided it would be unfair to punish anyone for avoiding opponents that didn't exist. So the Ring Ratings, too, were frozen until things cranked up again.

In late July, the schedule was deemed healthy enough to end the standstill, the shutters were finally thrown open and the housecleaning began. The Ratings Panel looked for anyone who hadn't fought since 2019 and had no solid plans to do so in the future. Here are the results:

CRUISERWEIGHT: Andrew Tabiti (No. 6 last month) and Arsen Goulamirian (No. 7) were removed. Moving in at Nos. 9 and 10 respectively were Polish veteran Mateusz Masternak and Belgium's Ryad Merhy.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT: Former "most feared man in boxing" Sergey Kovalev (No. 4), who hasn't seen action since his 2019 loss to Canelo Alvarez, was dropped, and undefeated up-and-comer Joshua Buatsi came in at No. 10.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHT: No.8-ranked Michel Soro was removed and once-beaten Dominican Carlos Adames was added at No. 10.

WELTERWEIGHT: Difficult to say how Keith Thurman (No. 4) should feel about Manny Pacquiao's loss to Yordenis Ugas, but "One Time" has been inactive since his own unfortunate meeting with the senator more than two years ago, so he was removed. Unbeaten Lithuanian Eimantas Stanionis entered at No. 10.

BANTAMWEIGHT: Former titleholder Zolani Tete (No. 5), inactive since a loss to John Riel Casimero in November 2019, was ejected and 24-year-old Scotsman Lee McGregor took the No. 10 spot.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHT: No. 9-rated Jeyvier Cintron was dropped and former 108-pound Ring champion Donnie Nietes returned to the ratings at No. 10.

FLYWEIGHT: Masayuki Kuroda, last seen in May 2019 in a decision loss to Moruti Mthalane, dropped out of the No. 6 spot and South Africa's Jackson Chauke debuted at No. 10.

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHT: Another South African, Sivenathi Nontshinga, was installed at No. 10 after Edward Heno (No. 5) was removed for inactivity.

STRAWWEIGHT: Two 105-pounders, Byron Rojas (No. 5) and Simpiwe Konkco (No. 7), got the boot, leaving room for Ginjiro Shigeoka at No. 9 and Melvin Jerusalem at No. 10.

Beyond the purge, some actual fight results also shifted the ratings …

HEAVYWEIGHT: Joe Joyce stayed unbeaten and climbed from No. 10 to No. 9 after a sixth-round stoppage of Carlos Takam (unrated). In the process, Joyce leapfrogged Oleksandr Usyk, who beat him in the World Series of Boxing but has yet to distinguish himself above cruiserweight as a full-fledged pro (more on that elsewhere in this issue). Michael Hunter stopped Mike Wilson (unrated) in four rounds and stayed put at No. 7.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT: Buatsi confirmed his credentials at 175 pounds by flooring Ricards Bolotniks (unrated) with a right cross from hell, notching his 10th consecutive stoppage.

WELTERWEIGHT: Vergil Ortiz (No. 10 last month) had a shaky start against Egidijus Kavaliauskas (unrated), but respect for his elder soon wore off and the 23-year-old Texan got to work chopping the Lithuanian down, which he succeeded in doing four times in the eighth round. Ortiz vaulted to No. 6 and boosted his enviable record to 18-0 (18 KOs).

Swapping the torch as they passed each other in the night, Ugas (No. 5 last month) and Pacquiao (No. 3) also switched places in the ratings, though it remains to be seen if Pac-man will wear any number much longer.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHT: Arnold Barboza (No. 5) won a near-shutout decision over Antonio Moran (unrated) to maintain his rank.

LIGHTWEIGHT: With back-to-back losses against Vasiliy Lomachenko and Ryan Garcia surely weighing heavily, Luke Campbell (No. 5 last month) announced his retirement, the 2012 Olympic gold medalist ending his pro run with a record of 20-4 (16 KOs). William Zepeda entered the ratings at No. 10 as a result.

FEATHERWEIGHT: The previously unrated Leigh Wood not only surprised a lot of people with a solid performance against Xu Can (No. 3), the 33-year-old Brit also floored Xu with a short right in the 12th and then handed the Chinese "Monster" his first stoppage loss moments later. Wood popped onto the list at No. 7, pushing out No. 10-rated Joet Gonzalez, and Xu slipped to No. 9.

Kid Galahad (No. 4 last month) grabbed his first title with an 11th-round stoppage of James Dickens (unrated) – an intelligent, skilled performance, but the panel didn't think it was enough to climb above No. 2-rated Emanuel Navarrete (under whom Galahad sits after Xu's fall).

Mark Magsayo was down midway through his fight against Julio Ceja (unrated), but he came back with a possible Knockout of the Year contender in the 10th. The undefeated Filipino held his position at No. 6.

BANTAMWEIGHT: McGregor was put on the canvas early by Vincent Legrand (unrated) but returned the favor in the fourth and won by knockout to validate his inclusion at No. 10.

John Riel Casimero (No. 2) and Guillermo Rigondeaux (No. 7) teamed up to create a 12-rounder with so few punches that it could pass for minimalist performance art, the "more aggressive" Casimero prevailing via split decision to keep his WBO belt (and, appropriately, neither fighter moved in the ratings). Like a true artist, Rigondeaux was as unapologetic as ever, still insisting that people just don't get him.

In an undercard fight that only required combined punches in the triple digits to overshadow the Casi-Rigo main event, Rau'shee Warren came up well short – but only because he wrecked Damien Vazquez in the second round with a single left-hand counter. It was impressive enough to get the former titleholder back into the ratings at No. 8 after a long absence.

Meanwhile, in Oklahoma, Australia's Jason Moloney outboxed Joshua Greer (unrated) and increased his status from No. 6 to No. 5.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHT: Andrew Moloney (No. 8 last month) didn't fare as well as his twin brother, sinking to No. 10 after losing a unanimous decision to Joshua Franco, who rose from No. 6 to No. 5.

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHT: IBF titleholder Felix Alvarado remained at No. 2 after his original opponent was replaced by a sacrifice named Israel Vazquez – no, not the one you're thinking of, who thankfully has remained retired since 2010 – and the fight was over in the first round.

P4P

1. **CANELO ALVAREZ** — Mexico • 56-1-2 (38 KOs)
2. **NAOYA INOUE** — Japan • 21-0-0 (18 KOs)
3. **TERENCE CRAWFORD** — U.S. • 37-0-0 (28 KOs)
4. **OLEKSANDR USYK** — Ukraine • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)
5. **JOSH TAYLOR** — U.K. • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)
6. **ERROL SPENCE JR.** — U.S. • 27-0-0 (21 KOs)
7. **TEOFIMO LOPEZ** — U.S. • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)
8. **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA** — Mexico • 42-3-0 (28 KOs)
9. **VASILIY LOMACHENKO** — Ukraine • 15-2-0 (11 KOs)
10. **KAZUTO IOKA** — Japan • 26-2-0 (15 KOs)

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

- C **TYSON FURY** RING, WBC — U.K. • 30-0-1 (21 KOs)
- 1 **ANTHONY JOSHUA** IBF, WBA, WBO — U.K. • 24-1-0 (22 KOs)
- 2 **DEONTAY WILDER** — U.S. • 42-1-1 (41 KOs)
- 3 **DILLIAN WHYTE** — U.K. • 28-2-0 (19 KOs)
- 4 **JOSEPH PARKER** — New Zealand • 29-2-0 (21 KOs)
- 5 **ANDY RUIZ JR.** — U.S. • 34-2-0 (22 KOs)
- 6 **LUIS ORTIZ** — Cuba • 32-2-0 (27 KOs)
- 7 **MICHAEL HUNTER** — U.S. • 20-1-1 (14 KOs)
- 8 **OSCAR RIVAS** — Colombia • 27-1-0 (19 KOs)
- 9 **JOE JOYCE** — U.K. • 13-0-0 (12 KOs)
- 10 **OLEKSANDR USYK** — Ukraine • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 POUNDS

- C **MAIRIS BRIEDIS** RING, IBF — Latvia • 27-1-0 (19 KOs)
- 1 **YUNIEL DORTICOS** — Cuba • 24-2-0 (22 KOs)
- 2 **ILUNGA MAKABU** WBC — Congo • 28-2-0 (25 KOs)
- 3 **LAWRENCE OKOLIE** WBO — U.K. • 16-0-0 (13 KOs)
- 4 **THABISO MCHUNU** — S. Africa • 23-5-0 (13 KOs)
- 5 **KEVIN LERENA** — S. Africa • 26-1-0 (13 KOs)
- 6 **KRZYSZTOF GLOWACKI** — Poland • 31-3-0 (19 KOs)
- 7 **ALEKSEI PAPIN** — Russia • 13-1-0 (12 KOs)
- 8 **MICHAL CIESLAK** — Poland • 21-1-0 (15 KOs)
- 9 **MATEUSZ MASTERNAK** — Poland • 44-5-0 (29 KOs)
- 10 **RYAD MERHY** — Belgium • 30-1-0 (25 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 POUNDS

- C **(VACANT)**
- 1 **ARTUR BETERBIEV** IBF, WBC — Russia • 16-0-0 (16 KOs)
- 2 **DMITRY BIVOL** WBA — Russia • 18-0-0 (11 KOs)
- 3 **JOE SMITH JR.** — U.S. • 27-3-0 (21 KOs)
- 4 **BADOU JACK** — Sweden • 24-3-3 (14 KOs)
- 5 **ELEIDER ALVAREZ** — Colombia • 25-2-0 (13 KOs)
- 6 **MARCUS BROWNE** — U.S. • 24-1-0 (16 KOs)
- 7 **MAXIM VLASOV** — Russia • 45-4-0 (26 KOs)
- 8 **LYNDON ARTHUR** — U.K. • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)
- 9 **GILBERTO RAMIREZ** — Mexico • 42-0-0 (28 KOs)
- 10 **JOSHUA BUATSI** — U.K. • 15-0-0 (13 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

- C **CANELO ALVAREZ** RING, WBA, WBC, WBO — Mexico • 56-1-2 (38 KOs)
- 1 **DAVID BENAVIDEZ** — U.S. • 24-0-0 (21 KOs)
- 2 **CALEB PLANT** IBF — U.S. • 21-0-0 (12 KOs)
- 3 **CALLUM SMITH** — U.K. • 27-1-0 (19 KOs)
- 4 **BILLY JOE SAUNDERS** — U.K. • 30-1-0 (14 KOs)
- 5 **ANTHONY DIRRELL** — U.S. • 33-2-2 (24 KOs)
- 6 **JOHN RYDER** — U.K. • 29-5-0 (16 KOs)
- 7 **DAVID LEMIEUX** — Canada • 43-4-0 (36 KOs)
- 8 **DANIEL JACOBS** — U.S. • 37-3-0 (30 KOs)
- 9 **FEDOR CHUDINOV** — Russia • 24-2-1 (16 KOs)
- 10 **CARLOS GONGORA** — Ecuador • 20-0-0 (15 KOs)

RATINGS

Through fights of Aug. 21, 2021

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **GENNADIY GOLOVKIN** IBF
  Kazakhstan • 41-1-1 (36 KOs)
- **2** **JERMALL CHARLO** WBC
  U.S. • 32-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **3** **DEMETRIUS ANDRADE** WBO
  U.S. • 30-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **4** **SERGIY DEREVYANCHENKO**
  Ukraine • 13-3-0 (10 KOs)
- **5** **RYOTA MURATA** WBA
  Japan • 16-2-0 (13 KOs)
- **6** **JAIME MUNGUIA**
  Mexico • 37-0-0 (30 KOs)
- **7** **ZHANIBEK ALIMKHANULY**
  Kazakhstan • 10-0-0 (6 KOs)
- **8** **CHRIS EUBANK JR.**
  U.K. • 30-2-0 (22 KOs)
- **9** **LIAM WILLIAMS**
  U.K. • 23-3-1 (18 KOs)
- **10** **FELIX CASH**
  U.K. • 14-0-0 (10 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

- **C** **JERMELL CHARLO** RING, WBC, IBF, WBA
  U.S. • 34-1-1 (18 KOs)
- **1** **BRIAN CASTANO** WBO
  Argentina • 17-0-2 (12 KOs)
- **2** **JARRETT HURD**
  U.S. • 24-2-0 (16 KOs)
- **3** **ERISLANDY LARA**
  Cuba • 28-3-3 (16 KOs)
- **4** **ERICKSON LUBIN**
  U.S. • 24-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **5** **JULIAN WILLIAMS**
  U.S. • 27-2-1 (16 KOs)
- **6** **TONY HARRISON**
  U.S. • 28-3-1 (21 KOs)
- **7** **TIM TSZYU**
  Australia • 19-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **8** **SEBASTIAN FUNDORA**
  U.S. • 17-0-1 (12 KOs)
- **9** **MAGOMED KURBANOV**
  Russia • 22-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **10** **CARLOS ADAMES**
  Dom. Rep. • 20-1-0 (16 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **ERROL SPENCE JR.** IBF, WBC
  U.S. • 27-0-0 (21 KOs)
- **2** **TERENCE CRAWFORD** WBO
  U.S. • 37-0-0 (28 KOs)
- **3** **YORDENIS UGAS** WBA
  Cuba • 27-4-0 (12 KOs)
- **4** **SHAWN PORTER**
  U.S. • 31-3-1 (17 KOs)
- **5** **MANNY PACQUIAO**
  Phil. • 62-8-2 (39 KOs)
- **6** **VERGIL ORTIZ JR.**
  U.S. • 18-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **7** **DANNY GARCIA**
  U.S. • 36-3-0 (21 KOs)
- **8** **JARON ENNIS**
  U.S. • 27-0-0 (25 KOs)
- **9** **KUDRATILLO ABDUKAKHOROV**
  Uzbekistan • 18-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **10** **EIMANTAS STANIONIS**
  Lithuania • 13-0-0 (9 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

- **C** **JOSH TAYLOR** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
  U.K. • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **1** **REGIS PROGRAIS**
  U.S. • 26-1-0 (22 KOs)
- **2** **JOSE RAMIREZ**
  U.S. • 26-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **3** **JOSE ZEPEDA**
  U.S. • 34-2-0 (26 KOs)
- **4** **VIKTOR POSTOL**
  Ukraine • 31-3-0 (12 KOs)
- **5** **ARNOLD BARBOZA**
  U.S. • 26-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **6** **GERVONTA DAVIS**
  U.S. • 25-0-0 (24 KOs)
- **7** **IVAN BARANCHYK**
  Russia • 20-2-0 (13 KOs)
- **8** **SUBRIEL MATIAS**
  Puerto Rico • 17-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **9** **MARIO BARRIOS**
  U.S. • 26-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **10** **SHOHJAHON ERGASHEV**
  Uzbekistan • 20-0-0 (18 KOs)

Australian Jason Moloney (right) advanced to No. 5 in the bantamweight rankings with a 10-round decision over Joshua Greer.

Rau'shee Warren (left) re-entered the bantamweight rankings at No. 8 with a second-round KO of Damien Vazquez.

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

- **C** **TEOFIMO LOPEZ** RING, WBA, WBO, IBF
  U.S. • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **1** **VASILIY LOMACHENKO**
  Ukraine • 15-2-0 (11 KOs)
- **2** **RYAN GARCIA**
  U.S. • 21-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **3** **DEVIN HANEY** WBC
  U.S. • 26-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **4** **RICHARD COMMEY**
  Ghana • 30-3-0 (27 KOs)
- **5** **JOSEPH DIAZ JR.**
  U.S. • 32-1-1 (15 KOs)
- **6** **JORGE LINARES**
  Venezuela • 47-6-0 (29 KOs)
- **7** **JAVIER FORTUNA**
  Dom. Rep. • 36-3-1 (25 KOs)
- **8** **GEORGE KAMBOSOS JR.**
  Australia • 19-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **9** **ISAAC CRUZ**
  Mexico • 22-1-1 (15 KOs)
- **10** **WILLIAM ZEPEDA**
  Mexico • 23-0-0 (21 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

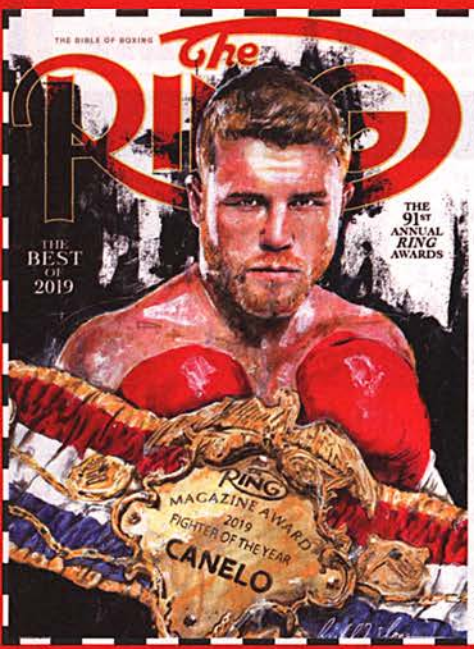
- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **GERVONTA DAVIS** WBA
  U.S. • 25-0-0 (24 KOs)
- **2** **OSCAR VALDEZ** WBC
  Mexico • 29-0-0 (23 KOs)
- **3** **JAMEL HERRING** WBO
  U.S. • 23-2-0 (11 KOs)
- **4** **MIGUEL BERCHELT**
  Mexico • 37-2-0 (33 KOs)
- **5** **TEVIN FARMER**
  U.S. • 30-5-1 (6 KOs)
- **6** **SHAVKATDZHON RAKHIMOV**
  Russia • 15-0-1 (12 KOs)
- **7** **CHRIS COLBERT**
  U.S. • 16-0-0 (6 KOs)
- **8** **SHAKUR STEVENSON**
  U.S. • 16-0-0 (8 KOs)
- **9** **ROGER GUTIERREZ**
  Venezuela • 26-3-1 (20 KOs)
- **10** **O'SHAQUIE FOSTER**
  U.S. • 18-2-0 (11 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **GARY RUSSELL JR.** WBC
  U.S. • 31-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **2** **EMANUEL NAVARRETE** WBO
  Mexico • 33-1-0 (28 KOs)
- **3** **KID GALAHAD**
  U.K. • 28-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **4** **MAURICIO LARA**
  Mexico • 22-2-0 (15 KOs)
- **5** **JOSH WARRINGTON**
  U.K. • 30-1-0 (7 KOs)
- **6** **MARK MAGSAYO**
  Phil. • 23-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **7** **LEIGH WOOD**
  U.K. • 25-2-0 (15 KOs)
- **8** **TUGSTSOGT NYAMBAYAR**
  Mongolia • 12-2-0 (9 KOs)
- **9** **XU CAN**
  China • 18-3-0 (3 KOs)
- **10** **JESSIE MAGDALENO**
  U.S. • 28-1-0 (18 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **MURODJON AKHMADALIEV** IBF, WBA
  Uzbekistan • 9-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **2** **DANIEL ROMAN**
  U.S. • 29-3-1 (10 KOs)
- **3** **STEPHEN FULTON** WBO
  U.S. • 19-0-0 (8 KOs)
- **4** **BRANDON FIGUEROA** WBC
  U.S. • 22-0-1 (17 KOs)
- **5** **ANGELO LEO**
  U.S. • 21-1-0 (9 KOs)
- **6** **HIROAKI TESHIGAWARA**
  Japan • 22-2-2 (15 KOs)
- **7** **RAEESE ALEEM**
  U.S. • 18-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **8** **AZAT HOVHANNISYAN**
  Armenia • 20-3-0 (16 KOs)
- **9** **RONNY RIOS**
  U.S. • 33-3-0 (16 KOs)
- **10** **RYOSUKE IWASA**
  Japan • 27-4-0 (17 KOs)



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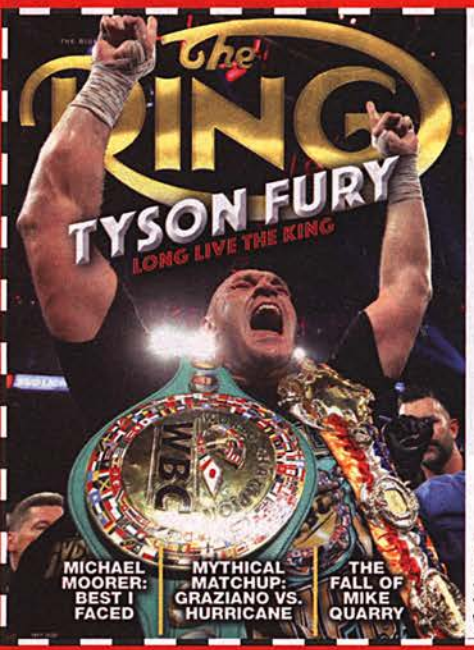

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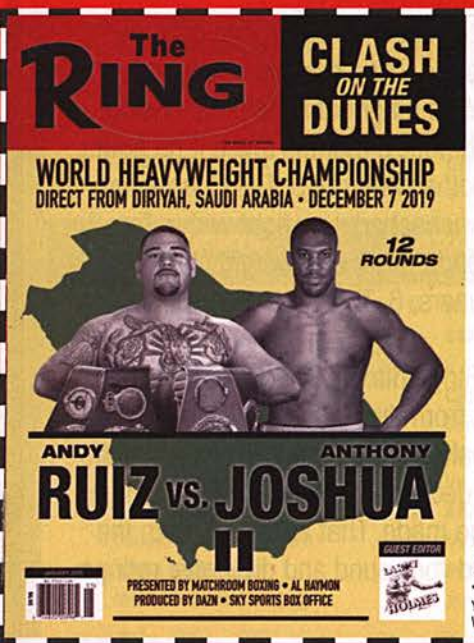

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RATINGS

Through fights of Aug. 21, 2021

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

- **C** **NAOYA INOUE** RING, IBF, WBA
  Japan • 21-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **1** **NONITO DONAIRE** WBC
  Phil. • 41-6-0 (27 KOs)
- **2** **JOHN RIEL CASIMERO** WBO
  Philippines • 31-4-0 (21 KOs)
- **3** **EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ**
  Puerto Rico • 19-2-0 (12 KOs)
- **4** **NORDINE OUBAALI**
  France • 17-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **5** **JASON MOLONEY**
  Australia • 22-2-0 (18 KOs)
- **6** **TAKUMA INOUE**
  Japan • 14-1-0 (3 KOs)
- **7** **GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX**
  Cuba • 20-2-0 (13 KOs)
- **8** **RAU'SHEE WARREN**
  U.S. • 19-3-0 (5 KOs)
- **9** **GARY ANTONIO RUSSELL**
  U.S. • 18-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **10** **LEE MCGREGOR**
  U.K. • 11-0-0 (9 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

- **C** **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA** RING, WBA, WBC
  Mexico • 42-3-0 (28 KOs)
- **1** **SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI**
  Thailand • 50-5-1 (43 KOs)
- **2** **ROMAN GONZALEZ**
  Nicaragua • 50-3-0 (41 KOs)
- **3** **KAZUTO IOKA** WBO
  Japan • 26-2-0 (15 KOs)
- **4** **JERWIN ANCAJAS** IBF
  Phil. • 33-1-2 (22 KOs)
- **5** **JOSHUA FRANCO**
  U.S. • 18-1-2 (8 KOs)
- **6** **KHALID YAFAI**
  U.K. • 26-1-0 (15 KOs)
- **7** **FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.**
  Mexico • 34-4-1 (24 KOs)
- **8** **CARLOS CUADRAS**
  Mexico • 39-4-1 (27 KOs)
- **9** **DONNIE NIETES**
  Philippines • 43-1-5 (23 KOs)
- **10** **ANDREW MOLONEY**
  Australia • 21-2-0 (14 KOs)

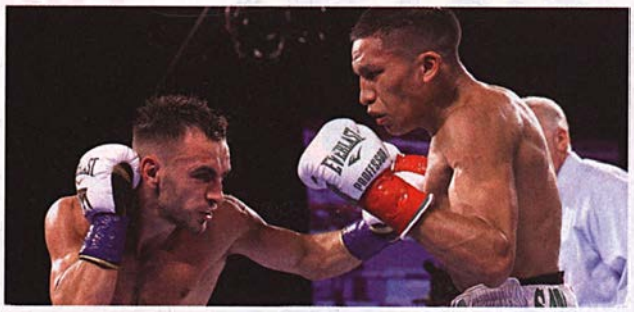
FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **JULIO CESAR MARTINEZ** WBC
  Mexico • 18-1-0 (14 KOs)
- **2** **SUNNY EDWARDS** IBF
  U.K. • 16-0-0 (4 KOs)
- **3** **ARTEM DALAKIAN** WBA
  Ukraine • 20-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **4** **JUNTO NAKATANI** WBO
  Japan • 21-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **5** **MORUTI MTHALANE**
  S. Africa • 39-3-0 (26 KOs)
- **6** **RICARDO SANDOVAL**
  U.S. • 19-1-0 (14 KOs)
- **7** **CRISTOFER ROSALES**
  Nicaragua • 31-5-0 (21 KOs)
- **8** **ANGEL ACOSTA**
  Puerto Rico • 22-2-0 (21 KOs)
- **9** **MCWILLIAMS ARROYO**
  Puerto Rico • 21-4-0 (16 KOs)
- **10** **JACKSON CHAUKE**
  S. Africa • 20-1-1 (14 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

- **C** **HIROTO KYOGUCHI** RING, WBA
  Japan • 15-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **1** **KENSHIRO TERAJI** WBC
  Japan • 18-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **2** **FELIX ALVARADO** IBF
  Nicaragua • 37-2-0 (32 KOs)
- **3** **ELWIN SOTO** WBO
  Mexico • 19-1-0 (13 KOs)
- **4** **HEKKIE BUDLER**
  S. Africa • 33-4-0 (10 KOs)
- **5** **SHO KIMURA**
  Japan • 19-3-2 (12 KOs)
- **6** **AGUSTIN GAUTO**
  Argentina • 16-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **7** **JESSE RODRIGUEZ**
  U.S. • 13-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **8** **ESTEBAN BERMUDEZ**
  Mexico • 14-3-2 (10 KOs)
- **9** **DANIEL MATELLON**
  Cuba • 12-0-2 (6 KOs)
- **10** **SIVENATHI NONTSHINGA**
  S. Africa • 10-0-0 (9 KOs)

An accidental headbutt ended Gary Antonio Russell-Emmanuel Rodriguez before the bout got started.



Andrew Moloney (left) gave his all vs. Joshua Franco but was outpointed for the second time in their three bouts.

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART** WBA
  Thailand • 21-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **2** **PETCHMANEE CP FRESHMART** WBC
  Thailand • 36-1-0 (23 KOs)
- **3** **WANHENG MENAYOTHIN**
  Thailand • 54-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **4** **WILFREDO MENDEZ** WBO
  Puerto Rico • 16-1-0 (6 KOs)
- **5** **VIC SALUDAR**
  Phil. • 21-4-0 (11 KOs)
- **6** **RENE MARK CUARTO** IBF
  Phil. • 19-2-2 (11 KOs)
- **7** **PEDRO TADURAN**
  Phil. • 14-3-1 (11 KOs)
- **8** **MASATAKA TANIGUCHI**
  Japan • 14-3-0 (9 KOs)
- **9** **GINJIRO SHIGEOKA**
  Japan • 6-0-0 (5 KOs)
- **10** **MELVIN JERUSALEM**
  Philippines • 17-2-0 (10 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED
RECORDS PROVIDED BY BOXREC.COM

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

The Ring Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

WOMEN'S RATINGS

Through fights of Aug. 21, 2021

POUND FOR POUND

1 **KATIE TAYLOR**
Ireland • 18-0-0 (6 KOs)

2 **CLARESSA SHIELDS**
U.S. • 11-0-0 (2 KOs)

3 **AMANDA SERRANO**
Puerto Rico • 40-1-1 (30 KOs)

4 **JESSICA MCCASKILL**
U.S. • 10-2-0 (3 KOs)

5 **DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 45-3-0 (18 KOs)

6 **CECILIA BRAEKHUS**
Norway • 36-2-0 (9 KOs)

7 **MIKAELA MAYER**
U.S. • 15-0-0 (5 KOs)

8 **CHANTELLE CAMERON**
U.K. • 14-0-0 (8 KOs)

9 **SENIESA ESTRADA**
U.S. • 21-0-0 (8 KOs)

10 **SAVANNAH MARSHALL**
U.K. • 10-0-0 (8 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **ELIN CEDERROOS** IBF, WBA
Sweden • 8-0-0 (4 KOs)
2 **FRANCHON CREWS-DEZURN** WBC, WBO
U.S. • 7-1-0 (2 KOs)
3 **EMA KOZIN**
Slovenia • 21-0-1 (11 KOs)
4 **CHRISTINA HAMMER**
Germany • 26-1-0 (12 KOs)
5 **SHADASIA GREEN**
U.S. • 8-0-0 (7 KOs)

MIDDLEWEIGHT
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

C **CLARESSA SHIELDS** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
U.S. • 11-0-0 (2 KOs)
1 **SAVANNAH MARSHALL**
U.K. • 10-0-0 (8 KOs)
2 **CHRISTINA HAMMER**
Germany • 26-1-0 (12 KOs)
3 **EMA KOZIN**
Slovenia • 21-0-1 (11 KOs)
4 **FEMKE HERMANS**
Belgium • 12-3-0 (5 KOs)
5 **ALMA IBARRA**
Mexico • 9-1-0 (4 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

C **CLARESSA SHIELDS** RING, WBC, WBO, IBF
U.S. • 11-0-0 (2 KOs)
1 **MARIE EVE DICAIRE**
Canada • 17-1-0 (0 KOs)
2 **CHRIS NAMUS**
Uruguay • 25-6-0 (8 KOs)
3 **HANNAH RANKIN**
U.K. • 10-5-0 (2 KOs)
4 **CYNTHIA LOZANO**
Mexico • 9-0-0 (7 KOs)
5 **AIDYL CARDENAS**
U.S. • 3-0-0 (0 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

C **JESSICA MCCASKILL** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
U.S. • 10-2-0 (3 KOs)
1 **CECILIA BRAEKHUS**
Norway • 36-2-0 (9 KOs)
2 **LAYLA MCCARTER**
U.S. • 44-13-5 (11 KOs)
3 **ORNELLA DOMINI**
Switzerland • 15-2-0 (3 KOs)
4 **VICTORIA BUSTOS**
Argentina • 21-6-0 (0 KOs)
5 **LOLITA MUZEYA**
Zambia • 16-0-0 (8 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **CHANTELLE CAMERON** WBC
U.K. • 14-0-0 (8 KOs)
2 **MARY MCGEE** IBF
U.S. • 27-3-0 (15 KOs)
3 **ERICA FARIAS**
Argentina • 26-5-0 (10 KOs)
4 **KALI REIS** WBA
U.S. • 18-7-1 (5 KOs)
5 **ANAHI SANCHEZ**
Argentina • 20-5-0 (12 KOs)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

C **KATIE TAYLOR** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
Ireland • 18-0-0 (6 KOs)
1 **DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 45-3-0 (18 KOs)
2 **ESTELLE MOSSELY**
Belgium • 9-0-0 (1 KOs)
3 **MIRIAM GUTIERREZ**
Spain • 13-1-0 (5 KOs)
4 **NATASHA JONAS**
U.K. • 9-2-1 (7 KOs)
5 **JENNIFER HAN**
U.S. • 18-3-1 (18 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **MIKAELA MAYER** WBO
U.S. • 15-0-0 (5 KOs)
2 **TERRI HARPER** WBC
U.K. • 11-0-1 (6 KOs)
3 **MAIVA HAMADOUCHE** IBF
France • 22-1-0 (18 KOs)
4 **HYUN MI CHOI** WBA
South Korea • 18-0-1 (4 KOs)
5 **EWA BRODNICKA**
Poland • 20-1-0 (2 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **AMANDA SERRANO** WBC, WBO
Puerto Rico • 40-1-1 (30 KOs)
2 **SARAH MAHFOUD**
Denmark • 10-0-0 (3 KOs)
3 **ERIKA CRUZ HERNANDEZ** WBA
Mexico • 13-1-0 (3 KOs)
4 **JELENA MRDJENOVICH**
Canada • 41-11-2 (19 KOs)
5 **NINA MEINKE**
Germany • 12-2-0 (3 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **JACKIE NAVA**
Mexico • 37-4-4 (16 KOs)
2 **DINA THORSLUND** WBO
Denmark • 16-0-0 (6 KOs)
3 **YAMILETH MERCADO** WBC
Mexico • 18-2-0 (5 KOs)
4 **SEGOLENE LEFEBVRE**
France • 14-0-0 (1 KOs)
5 **MARIANA JUAREZ**
Mexico • 55-10-4 (19 KOs)

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **ZULINA MUNOZ**
Mexico • 53-3-2 (30 KOs)
2 **YULIHAN LUNA AVILA** WBC
Mexico • 21-3-1 (3 KOs)
3 **MARIANA JUAREZ**
Mexico • 55-10-4 (19 KOs)
4 **MARIA CECILIA ROMAN** IBF
Argentina • 15-5-1 (0 KOs)
5 **DINA THORSLUND** WBO
Denmark • 16-0-0 (6 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **LOURDES JUAREZ** WBC
Mexico • 32-2-0 (4 KOs)
2 **GUADALUPE MARTINEZ**
Mexico • 20-10-0 (6 KOs)
3 **JESSICA CHAVEZ**
Mexico • 32-5-3 (4 KOs)
4 **DIANA FERNANDEZ**
Mexico • 23-4-0 (4 KOs)
5 **MIYO YOSHIDA**
Japan • 15-2-0 (0 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **NAOKO FUJIOKA** WBA
Japan • 19-2-1 (7 KOs)
2 **ARELY MUCINO** WBO
Mexico • 29-3-2 (10 KOs)
3 **MARLEN ESPARZA**
U.S. • 10-1-0 (1 KOs) WBC
4 **IBETH ZAMORA**
Mexico • 32-7-0 (12 KOs)
5 **JESSICA NERY PLATA**
Mexico • 27-2-0 (3 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **SENIESA ESTRADA** WBO
U.S. • 21-0-0 (8 KOs)
2 **TSUNAMI TENKAI**
Japan • 28-13-1 (16 KOs)
3 **EVELYN BERMUDEZ** IBF
Argentina • 14-0-1 (4 KOs)
4 **KIM CLAVEL**
Canada • 13-0-0 (2 KOs)
5 **TANIA ENRIQUEZ**
Mexico • 17-0-0 (8 KOs)

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **SENIESA ESTRADA** WBA
U.S. • 21-0-0 (8 KOs)
2 **CHRISTINA RUPPRECHT** WBC
Germany • 11-0-1 (3 KOs)
3 **YOKASTA VALLE** IBF
Nicaragua • 22-2-0 (9 KOs)
4 **ANABEL ORTIZ**
Mexico • 31-4-0 (4 KOs)
5 **ETSUKO TADA** WBO
Japan • 20-3-3 (7 KOs)

ATOMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 102 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **MONSERRAT ALARCON** WBA
Mexico • 15-4-2 (0 KOs)
2 **FABIANA BYTYQI** WBC
Czech Rep. • 17-0-1 (5 KOs)
3 **MIKA IWAKAWA** WBO
Japan • 10-5-1 (3 KOs)
4 **ERI MATSUDA**
Japan • 4-0-1 (1 KO)
5 **YENIFER LEON**
Venezuela • 13-3-0 (9 KOs)

SHOWDOWN AT THE PALACE

SUGAR RAY LEONARD'S EPIC BATTLE WITH **THOMAS HEARNS** REMAINS THE STANDARD BY WHICH ALL WELTERWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIPS ARE MEASURED

By **Tom Gray**

Leonard: "Thomas Hearns has a great body until it gets to the top of his head; he has no brains."

Hearns: "All your soft-drink commercials are going down the drain."

The buildup to the undisputed welterweight championship bout between Sugar Ray Leonard and Thomas Hearns, dubbed "The Showdown," perhaps threatened to get ugly but was largely respectful. This fight didn't get made because there was bad blood. This fight didn't get made because it was convenient for TV networks and promoters. The fight got made because both men were obsessed with being the best – it was an inevitable matchup and nothing was allowed to get in the way.

Imagine that!

Leonard (30-1, 21 knockouts), 25, was an Olympic champion with a movie star exterior, massive commercial appeal and otherworldly talent. The Palmer Park, Maryland, resident had ridden the crest of a wave since turning professional in February 1977 and was a household name before lifting Ring and WBC welterweight titles from the previously unbeaten Wilfred Benitez in November 1979. Leonard lost his own unbeaten record to the legendary Roberto Duran in a classic encounter in June 1980 but settled the score in a direct rematch »

The 22-year-old Hearns (32-0, 30 KOs) entered the professional ranks in November 1977 in relative obscurity. However, a string of spectacular knockouts – 17 straight – in and around his home city of Detroit transformed the freakishly tall knockout artist into a lucrative fistic franchise. Before he'd won the WBA welterweight title with a violent second-round knockout of long-reigning champ Pipino Cuevas in August 1980, Hearns had sold out every major arena in the Motor City.

Three months prior to their superfight, both men scored stoppage wins on the same card in Houston, Texas. Leonard picked up the Ring 154-pound championship and a WBA belt with a stoppage triumph over underrated southpaw Ayub Kalule, and Hearns blasted out the overmatched Pablo Baez in his third title defense.

It was now time for the perfect welterweight storm.

Opinion was divided on the outcome. In a poll conducted in the September 1981 issue of The Ring, 13 experts favored Leonard, 11 went for Hearns and 13 refused to pick a winner. By fight time, Hearns was a slight favorite at 7-to-5, although the odds probably slanted in favor of "The Hitman" due to the huge amount of money coming in from loyal Detroit fans, many of whom had descended on Las Vegas in the hope of seeing their man vanquish Sugar Ray in style.

On Wednesday, September 16, 1981, at a temporary arena erected outside Caesars Palace, two outstanding champions – both in their respective primes – entered the ring ... and the world stopped.

SUGAR COATED

"The bell rang and – oh, what feints! What speed! Between the first and second rounds, I noticed the studious eyes of [Muhammad] Ali. He had the same look on his face a law professor might wear while sitting in the back of a mock court as his protégés argued cases brilliantly."

Hearns came in well below the welterweight limit, but did the decision to go light cost him?

This was how the late, great sportswriter Ralph Wiley, who was stationed ringside, recalled the opening three minutes of "The Showdown" in his 1989 book *Serenity*. Leonard was as sure of himself off the back foot as Hearns was coming forward, and both men released punches with incredible speed and confidence. It was boxing at its best. As the bell rang to end that session, Leonard pushed Hearns' face to the side and an enraged Hitman responded with a short right to the face before being ushered back to his corner by diminutive referee Davey Pearl.

Don't fool around with me, Ray!

Over the next four rounds, Hearns put on a clinic. Leonard kept on the move, but his head was continually snapped back by a lance-like jab, and the ominous threat of the Detroit man's right hand bombing – for the most part – kept Sugar Ray at safe distance. Leonard's skill level was so respected that few experts had predicted that Hearns could win a boxing match, but one or two things had been ignored. Firstly, Hearns had a seven-and-a-half-inch reach advantage (78 to 70½), and his official three-inch height edge (6-foot-1 to 5-foot-10) was probably larger (having met Ray on three occasions, I'd say a touch over 5-foot-8 was more accurate.) However, despite the gangly Hearns being gifted by Mother Nature, he also had incredible hand speed and ring craft.

"It was discouraging to say the least," Leonard once told me of his early-round plight. "I was really impressed in the ring, and I was just trying to catch up with him. Tommy was outboxing me, giving me angles, and I was saying to myself: 'Who is this guy?' I knew Tommy could box, but I didn't know he could box that well."

Leonard had fallen way behind, but the experience he'd gained in fights with Benitez and Duran would prove to be a major asset. Benitez was a defensive wizard who forced Leonard to execute on a technical level not previously required, while Duran got inside Leonard's head, challenged his manhood, hurt him physically and handed him his first professional loss. Five months after that setback, Sugar Ray would prove to the world that he could overcome adversity by befuddling the great Duran in the "No Mas" rematch and forcing him to quit.

Now, against Hearns, Leonard had just 30 minutes to save the day.

HEARNS ON THE HOOK

The Hitman's gun suddenly jammed

with a minute remaining in the sixth. The momentum of a missed overhand right by Leonard brought his own head to waist-level, and as Hearns attempted to counterpunch down, his rival sprung up with a ferocious left hook to the jaw. The punch had an immediate effect, and Sugar Ray went to work. Having waited this long to hurt his man, Leonard's killer instinct meter was at maximum. There was no time for bolo punches, shoeshine flurries or Ali shuffles – every shot Leonard threw was a bomb, and he judged the distance of his attack perfectly. Instead of being on the end of Hearns' long levers, he was now just a touch inside of them. That positioning took away Hearns' vaunted punching power, but it also meant that Leonard had enough room to unload his entire repertoire on an injured fighter. Hooks and uppercuts to the head kept Hearns woozy, but a brutal left hand to the body almost snapped him in half before the bell.

Leonard was on the ascent and The Hitman was now the hurt man.

"We doctored [Tommy] up, put some ice [on him], brought him back as quick as we could and sent him out there ... for some more damage," recalled Hearns' cutman, Don Thibodeaux, somewhat soberly in an HBO interview in 2001. "Tommy was in so much pain, I don't know how he stayed on his feet; I really don't."

The seventh round was worse. A cerebral warrior, Leonard now knew that the key to victory was taking the fight to Hearns. Sugar Ray marched across the ring confidently and closed the gap in an instant. He thumped the jab into Hearns' face, picked off the weaker blows coming back and slammed home hard hooks to the body. When Hearns dropped his hands to protect an already damaged midsection, Leonard released volleys of spectacular headshots that drove his stricken foe backward. It was three minutes of brutal punishment for the man from Detroit.

"I'm gonna stop the fight," barked Emanuel Steward after Hearns staggered back to his corner and slumped on to his stool, looking every part the beaten man.

"No, don't stop it," slurred Hearns through a thick fog of breathlessness and pain.

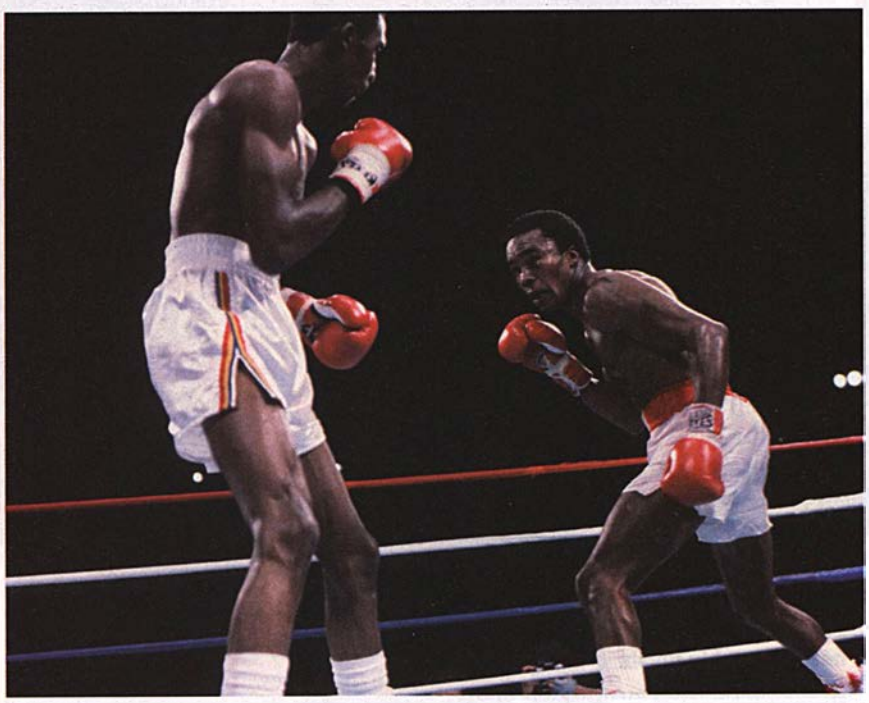
"But you ain't punching, man. I'm gonna have to stop it if you don't punch!"

In the immediate aftermath of the fight – and in the decades that followed – there's been some debate as to how the sixth and seventh rounds were scored. Hearns had won four of the first five rounds on two judges' scorecards and all five rounds on the other by a 10-9 margin. The Hitman was awarded those sessions because he'd controlled distance, outboxed his man and scored with the sharper blows. Leonard, however, inflicted significant damage in the sixth and seventh, and despite taking punches back, his dominance was clear. Las Vegas officials Duane Ford, Lou Tabat and Chuck Minker scored those rounds 10-9 Leonard, but should they have been scored 10-8?

"You can have a 10-8 round without a knockdown," offered veteran Las Vegas judge Dave Moretti, a highly respected official with over 40 years of experience. "One fighter has to give the other guy a pretty bad beating; he's got to be in total control of the round, total dominance, but it's up to the judges to decide that. I wouldn't go against what the judges saw that night. It's a very hard job, and if that's what they saw, then that's the end of it."

I asked Moretti if the 10-point must system should be more flexible in the modern game. Is it fair – or sensible – to give a fighter the same score (10-9) for inflicting brutal punishment in a three-minute period as you would give a fighter who edges a round that's largely devoid of action?

"I can only go by what they give me to work with," countered Moretti immediately. "You've got to understand, each round is a fight. There's 12 fights in there (15 in the case of Leonard-Hearns), not just one. One of the fighters gets a 10 and the other fighter gets nine or less. I've scored rounds 10-8 without a knockdown, no doubt about it. It doesn't happen a lot, it's not a frequent occurrence, but it does happen."



Hearns' huge advantages in height and reach kept Leonard from getting off for long periods.

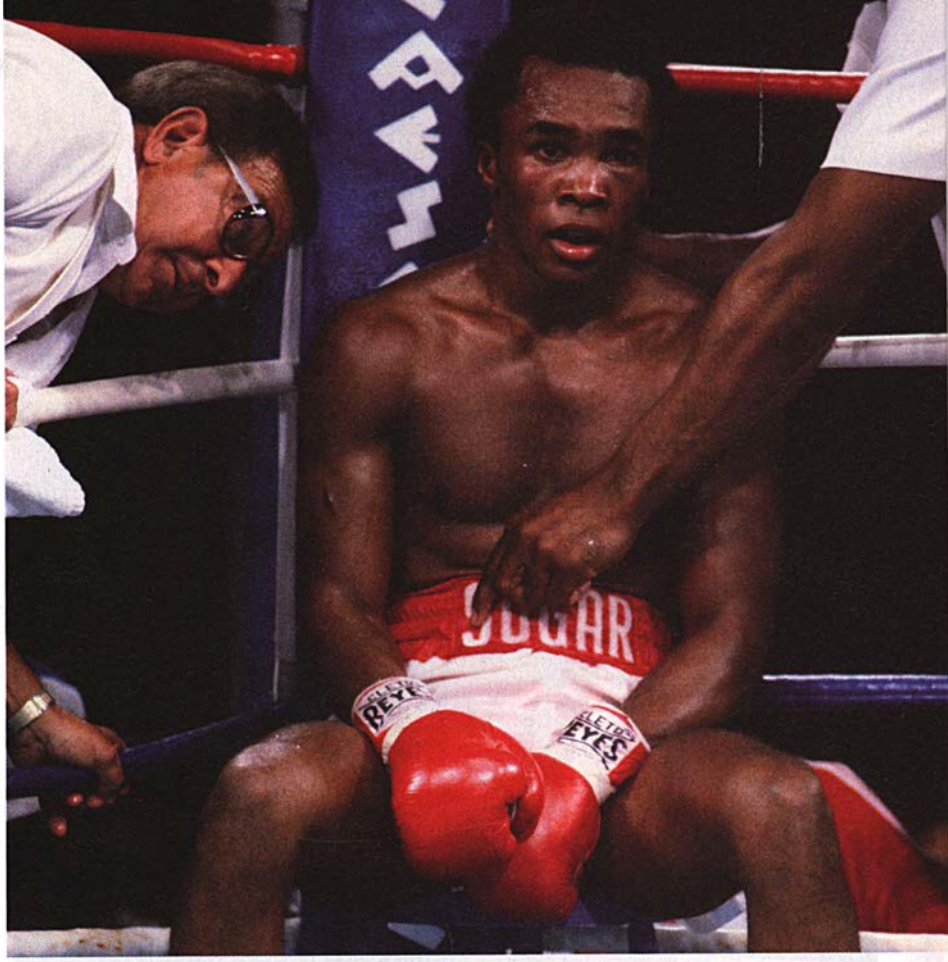
MAY I HAVE THIS DANCE?

Hearns had never been seriously hurt in a professional fight before. In his biggest test, he'd bludgeoned Cuevas to defeat inside six minutes and left the ring without a scratch. The Hitman had only been extended beyond eight rounds on four previous occasions, and in his longest outing to that point, a 12th-round stoppage of durable Californian Randy Shields, he'd won almost every minute of the fight.

But while there was no pro experience to draw upon in this situation, Hearns always had the facility to revert back to his amateur days, and he now did so at the behest of Steward. In the unpaid ranks, Hearns had the reputation of a fluid boxer-mover who was quick and hard to catch. He went an eye-popping 155-8 as an amateur but produced very few stoppages. Still ahead on all three scorecards, Hearns didn't need to stop Leonard; what he needed to do was re-establish command and stop his rampaging opponent from getting set.

In the eighth round, Hearns came out to box and move, and while he lost the session on two of the judges' scorecards, those three minutes were like gold dust for the Detroit star. Hearns regained his senses and got his legs back, while Leonard couldn't land with the same authority. The roles now completely flipped with the puncher assuming the role of dancer and the dancer assuming the role of puncher.

With his left eye rapidly swelling, Leonard could barely land a blow on this near-invisible version of Hearns, but he wasn't expending anywhere near the same energy in the desert heat – estimated to be 90 degrees or more under the lights – as his fleet-footed foe. That would prove to be crucial. In the early 1980s, weigh-ins took place on the same day as the fight. The lanky Hearns had come in at 145 pounds, his lightest weight in over two years, and to move and box in the second half of a 15-rounder with resources depleting is a huge ask. Leonard, who had weighed in at



With his left eye badly swollen and time running out, Leonard knew he needed the big finish.

a comfortable 146, knew intrinsically that Hearns would tire. "The Sugar Man" may have been losing rounds, but he was making Hearns work extremely hard to win them.

What if Hearns, like today, had the benefit of a full day or more to rehydrate? What if he'd carried a significant weight advantage into the ring? What if he had that extra fuel to burn?

"Revisionist history is always 100 percent," said venerable Philly boxing trainer Stephen Edwards. "I don't think it was much of a factor, to be honest with you. Hearns was a big guy and he was making 147 pounds just fine. He chose to weigh in at 145; it wasn't a catchweight.

"Hearns was great at 154 and 160, but he was never as dominant as he was at 147. People remember the Duran knockout, but Hearns was taken the distance quite often above welterweight. He went the distance with Ernie Singletary in his next fight. Murray Sutherland. I do believe Emanuel Steward when he said that Hearns was overdoing it in training for Leonard, doing extra runs, but that's part of the fight game, not to overdo it. As time goes by, people often look for reasons as to why this guy or that guy won. But as great a fighter as Hearns was, Leonard always had better stamina. Leonard still had better stamina when Hearns was the much bigger and stronger guy in the rematch in '89. If you remember, Hearns was holding on at the end of that fight."

LEONARD LIGHTNING

As Leonard sat on his stool at the end of the 12th round with his left eye almost completely closed, legendary trainer Angelo Dundee decided to make the switch to motivator. Tactics no longer mattered.

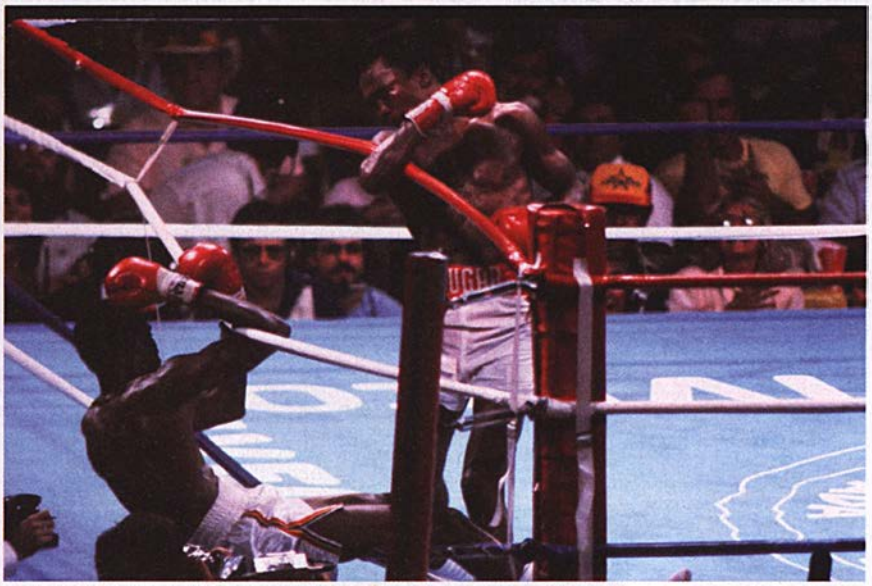
"You're blowin' it, son" is perhaps the most oft-quoted phrase uttered by a trainer in boxing history, but there was more than that during this 60-second interval. Dundee also stressed urgency with his body

language; he told Leonard that he had "nine minutes" and that he had to "separate the men from the boys." But just before Leonard stood up to contest arguably the greatest round he ever fought, Dundee got right in his ear: "C'mon, Ray, you've gotta be quicker; you've got to take it away from him, OK?" Following a brief delay, Dundee then yelled, "Speed!"

Halfway through the 13th round, Leonard nailed his man with a perfect one-two. Had it been earlier in the fight, Hearns could probably have absorbed those strikes and fired back, but with the damage he'd already accrued, his tank almost empty and a great fighter on the attack, the WBA titleholder now wilted. Dundee had requested "speed" and he got it. Leonard followed up with what was arguably the greatest single assault ever seen in a prize ring: too many punches to count, every target area struck flush in a visceral and merciless display of ferocity. Unable to respond or escape, Hearns ended up through the ropes, near his own corner, and although Pearl called no knockdown, this moment was as crucial as any knockdown Leonard had ever scored. Hearns rose, ran for dear life and even attempted to fire back when forced to, but Leonard would bull his man over for an official knockdown before this brutal round was over.

The sand wasn't just running out of Hearns' hourglass. The hourglass had been thrown at a brick wall.

Despite the huge effort of that 13th round, Leonard was now on his second or third wind, pumped full of adrenaline, whereas Hearns looked absolutely spent. In the 14th, Sugar Ray was finding his targets all too often when, with just over a minute gone, he timed his man moving left with a whipping overhand right to the chin. As Hearns' legs dipped, Leonard's hands simultaneously rose skyward in celebration. It was now a formality. The Hitman could only hold himself erect while Leonard teed off at will, and Pearl called off "The Showdown" at 1:45 of the penultimate round.



A ferocious attack by Sugar Ray changed both the course of the fight and welterweight history.

"Hail to the new undisputed welterweight champion of the world, Sugar Ray Leonard," bellowed famed ring announcer Chuck Hull, officially anointing the winner as an all-time great less than five years after his pro debut.

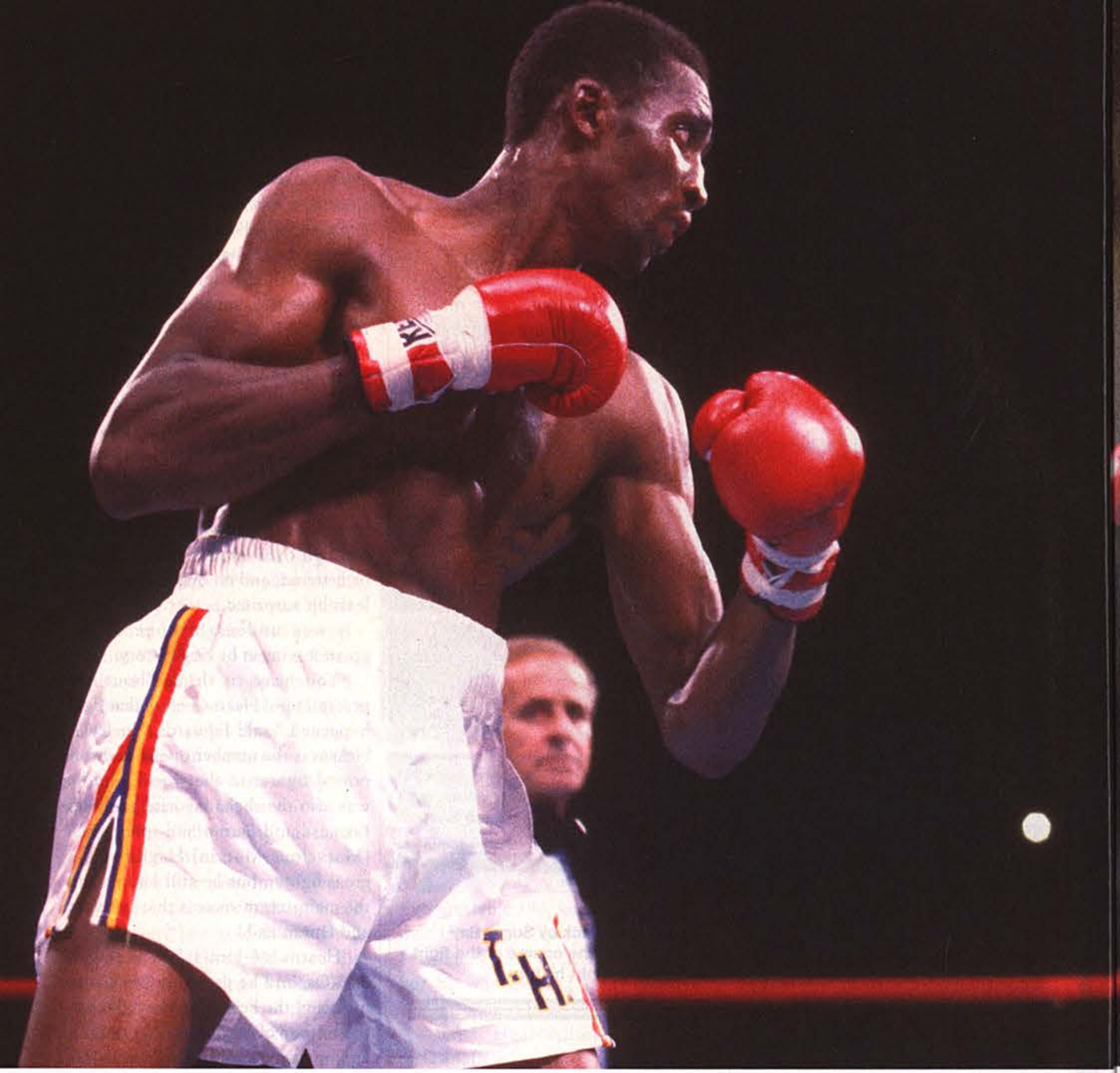
This superfight was a massive shot in the arm for boxing in 1981, and both men's reputations were elevated. Over the next decade, Hearns continued to defeat elite-level opposition and, like Leonard, he captured a hoard of world title belts from 154 to 175 pounds. With every bit of success Hearns enjoyed, Leonard's win over him grew exponentially. Four decades on, "The Showdown" remains the benchmark to which all elite-level welterweight matchups are compared. Oscar De La Hoya and Felix Trinidad didn't come close to matching it when they met in September 1999. Floyd Mayweather and Manny Pacquiao tickled each other by comparison in May 2015. Politics and egos have prevented Errol Spence and Terence Crawford from even getting in the ring. Another 40 years could go by without Leonard's triumph over Hearns being equaled or bettered, and no one would be the least bit surprised.

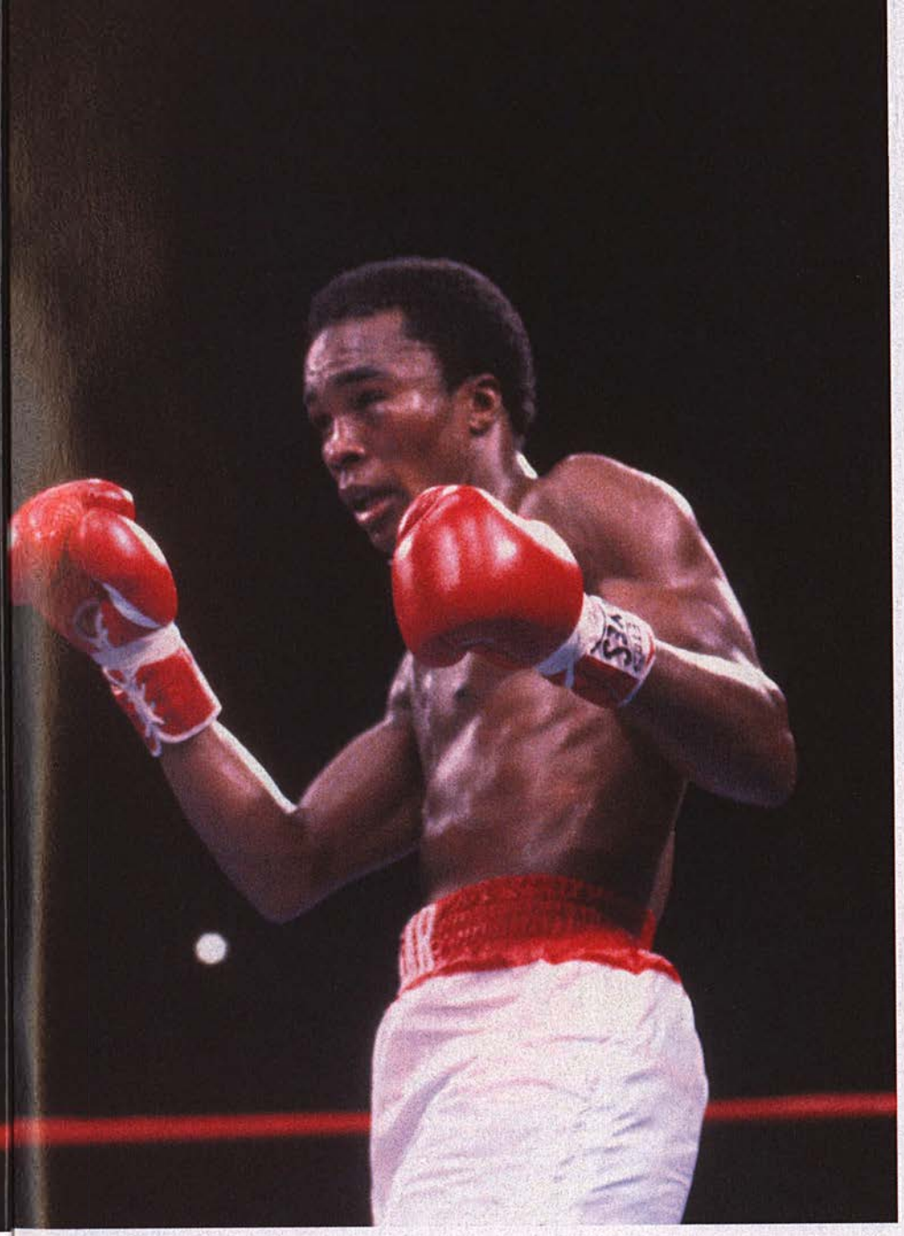
It was undeniably one of the greatest wins in boxing history.

"You have to think about the perception of Hearns before that fight happened," said Edwards. "In 1981, Hearns is the number one pound-for-pound fighter in the world, and he was also the slight favorite going in. Leonard and Duran had split fights. [Marvelous Marvin] Hagler was a great fighter, but he still hadn't had the mainstream success that Leonard and Duran had.

"Hearns is 6-foot-1, he's 32-0 with 30 KOs, and he probably has a case for being the best offensive fighter in the history of boxing at that time ... and he's a physical freak. Even to this day, 40 years later, there hasn't been a welterweight who would be favored to beat Thomas Hearns – not Floyd Mayweather Jr., not Manny Pacquiao, not Felix Trinidad, not Oscar De La Hoya, not Shane Mosley, not Donald Curry. In fact, in the 30 years before Hearns, there wouldn't be a fighter favored to beat him at welterweight. You'd probably have to go all the way back to Sugar Ray Robinson."

On September 16, 1981, in what would later be named The Ring's Fight of the Year, Ray Leonard proved that "Sugar" was not only a moniker of convenience. The new undisputed champion had fully earned it.





MEMORIES OF THE HITMAN

By **Sugar Ray Leonard**

This was the greatest night of my boxing career because of the fight's significance. It was that big. My wins over Wilfred Benitez, Roberto Duran, Marvelous Marvin Hagler; they're up there too, but this was for the undisputed welterweight championship of the world and that's what gives it the edge. There's more of an emotional feeling, a spiritual feeling.

I remember hearing the name Tommy Hearns way before we fought. He was annihilating opponents, knocking them cold, knocking them out of the ring. Tommy was known as "a killer" because of his punching power, and just look at the fight with Pipino Cuevas. Anywhere Cuevas hit you, he hurt you; he was a knockout artist, and the way Tommy dismantled him and then one punch – the right hand – and it was all over! I remember being confident that I could beat Tommy, but when that knockout happened, I said to myself, "Maybe I should rethink this!"

I just had a great team around me. There was Dave Jacobs, Pepe Correa – they trained me before Angelo Dundee would join us in camp – and Ollie Dunlap was my guy, too. I had great guys around me. They were amazing, understanding, and they knew the game. We had an incredible relationship, and that's so important – to have a solid relationship with your trainers, your team. I had that. My brother, Roger, actually thought that Tommy would beat me, but he never said that at the time, which was smart. He admits it now.

And I was losing that fight against Tommy. A fighter knows when they're losing and they know they have to pick it up. It honestly felt like it was 100 degrees in that ring; my left eye was closing, Tommy's boxing me. He showed me talent that we didn't think he possessed – at least I didn't. In that position, you have to bring up that extra hidden reservoir of strength from your gut. You have to believe in yourself, and I just reached down. Not everyone can do it, but I wanted to win. I never lost hope and I never gave up.

When I hurt Tommy in the sixth and seventh rounds, I thought the fight was over. I said, "This is it!" I'm winning, the fight had switched, but Tommy showed so much heart to come back, so much talent, it was just amazing. When I hurt a guy, nine times out of 10, it's over – I go to the body, I throw a barrage of punches. But Tommy was able to survive it.

When I hurt Tommy again in the 13th round, I don't know how I was able to put that many punches together. I knew I'd trained hard – I mean I trained so hard for that fight. Instead of sparring three-minute rounds, I sparred five-minute rounds. Instead of a one-minute rest period, I had a 30-second rest period. I had fresh guys in for sparring. I was ready, I was prepared. And even mentally, I was prepared to go the distance. I was determined to walk out of that ring as the champ. I always had a plan A, B and C, and I would do whatever it took to win – not just a round, but a fight. And the fact is that I had to win that fight by stoppage, knockout or technical knockout. I had to get it going my way.

When I eventually won the fight, my guys, as always, picked me up, and this time they cut my wind off. I'm exhausted anyway, but they're holding me so tight that I could barely breathe. I just let it all go for victory that night. To this day, my wife always says, "I can't believe you're a fighter!" I'm non-confrontational, laid back, maybe a bit shy, but inside that ring I had the eye of the tiger.

I knew back then that Tommy would go on to have a great career, and I would have been surprised if he didn't. Tommy was one of the best welterweights. If you look at the fight now, just look at the speed and power of that jab. What a weapon! So many fans love Tommy because of his style; he just goes for broke. Sometimes he abandons his height and reach advantages to get you out of there with the power. He's just loved by the fans.

I'm 65 now and I don't really think about age, but I can't believe that it's been 40 years. I actually spoke to Tommy yesterday and we're going to get together in a couple of days. RING

The boxing world may never experience a phenomenon like Manny Pacquiao again.

END OF AN ERA

WITH THE EFFECTS OF AGE NOW CLEARLY VISIBLE AND POLITICAL ASPIRATIONS CALLING, **MANNY PACQUIAO'S** LOSS TO **YORDENIS UGAS** MIGHT FINALLY BE THE LAST PERFORMANCE IN ONE OF BOXING HISTORY'S MOST REMARKABLE CAREERS

By **Dan Rafael**

It was 20 summers ago when pre-legend Manny Pacquiao arrived on these shores from the Philippines as a little-known former flyweight champion looking for a new trainer and a chance to make something of himself in the United States.

In early June 2001, Pacquiao was vacationing in San Francisco when he decided to take a bus to Los Angeles in search of a gym. He showed up at trainer Freddie Roach's Wild Card Boxing Club in Hollywood, California, and the rest is history.

"After the first round, I returned to my corner and said, 'I just found my new trainer,'" Pacquiao recalled. "Freddie was great with the mitts and, as I soon found out, great with instruction, too."

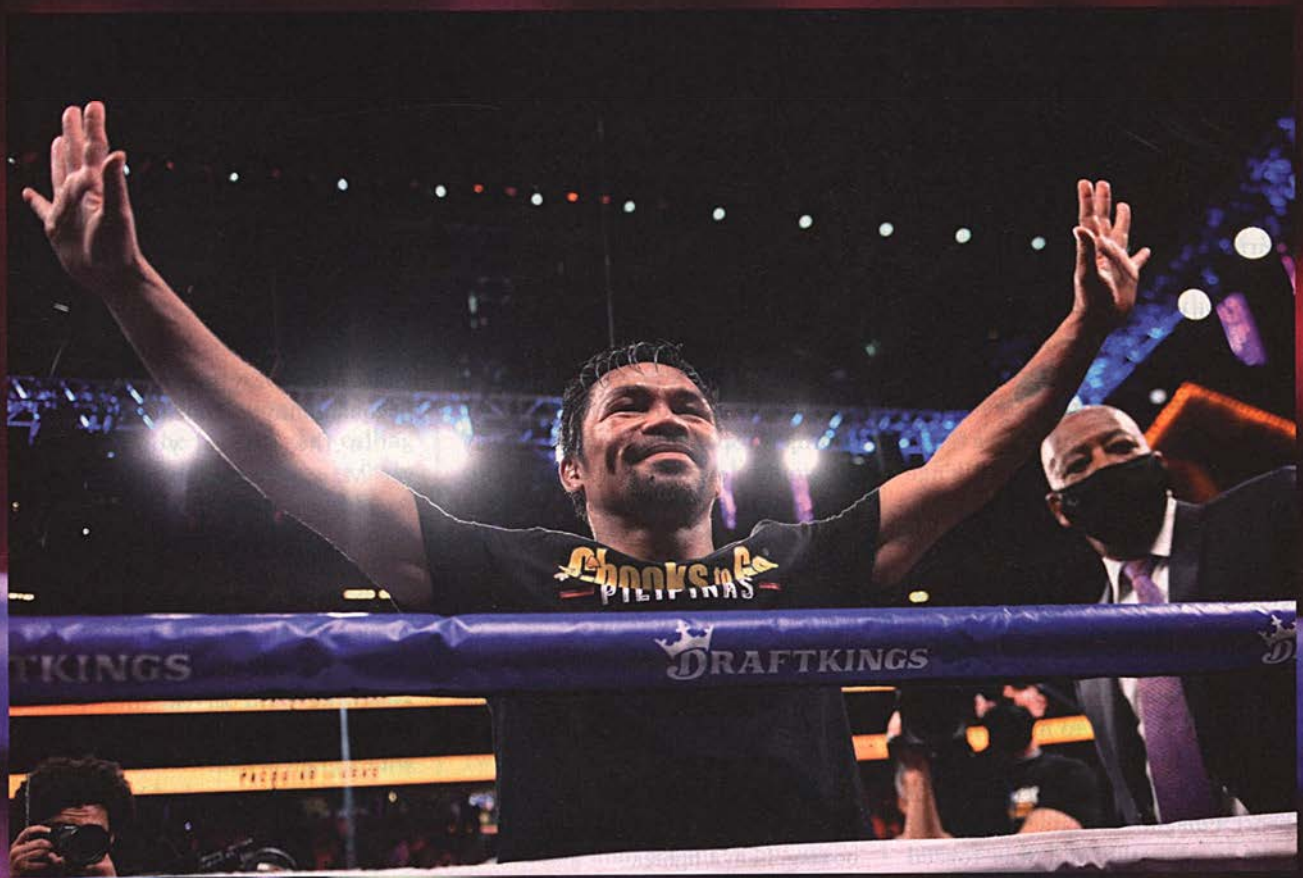
Roach's memory of that day is similar.

"I opened up Wild Card in hopes that one day a new Muhammad Ali would walk in looking for a trainer. And then, in 2001, he did. Only he was nearly a foot shorter, weighed 122 pounds and spoke very little English," Roach said. "I remember the first time we met. He came in looking for a trainer to work the mitts, and after the first round, I went back to my corner and said, 'This guy is sensational. We have a new fighter.'"

After two weeks of working with Roach, Pacquiao was preparing to return to the Philippines when he was offered a spot as a late replacement to challenge Lehlo Ledwaba for his IBF junior featherweight title on the Oscar De La Hoya-Javier Castillejo undercard at the MGM Grand.

"If that call comes a day later, Manny misses out on that fight," Roach said. "We trained for two weeks, and every day I'm falling more and more in love with his boxing skills and power. He was that good."

Much to the shock of virtually everybody, Pacquiao, who was so unknown that the HBO commentators calling the



END OF AN ERA

fight on the pay-per-view had a hard time properly pronouncing his name, destroyed Ledwaba in six rounds to win the title.

"Manny and I went from strangers to a world championship team in about two weeks," Roach said. "It sounds like a movie, doesn't it?"

"That fight changed my life," Pacquiao said.

It was a resounding victory that set in motion a two-decade run of all-time greatness that may have finally concluded with an upset loss to unheralded Yordenis Ugas, himself a late replacement, at T-Mobile Arena.

Riding a powerful right hand and effective jab, Ugas, who at one point was out of boxing for more than two years after suffering consecutive losses in 2014 and having had problems making the 140-pound junior welterweight limit, put together a strong second half of the fight to outpoint Pacquiao 116-112, 116-112 and 115-113 while also retaining the WBA welterweight title over which there was so much dispute. The reason: Ugas was elevated from WBA "regular" titlist to "super" titleholder when Pacquiao was unceremoniously stripped in January, ostensibly due to inactivity – despite the global coronavirus pandemic that left many boxers inactive – leaving both men with a claim to the belt.

When Pacquiao finally planned his return from a 25-month layoff after having dropped and masterfully outpointed the previously undefeated Keith Thurman in July 2019 to win the WBA title – and set yet another record as the oldest welterweight champion, at age 40 – he was supposed to challenge unified titleholder Errol Spence Jr. on August 21.

However, less than two weeks before the fight, Spence was diagnosed with a torn retina (later confirmed as detached) in his left eye during a pre-fight exam and forced to withdraw. Ugas was scheduled to make his first defense against Fabian Maidana in the co-feature, but around the time of Spence's diagnosis, Maidana suffered a cut in sparring and was forced out. With Pacquiao and Ugas both without an opponent, and Premier Boxing Champions and Fox Sports trying to save the pay-per-view show, they agreed to fight each other on 11 days' notice with the rightful WBA champion storyline a bonus.

If Pacquiao was willing to face a pound-for-pound elite fighter in the southpaw Spence, there was no way he would decline to face the right-handed Ugas. And Ugas, already 3-0 against short-notice opponents (including wins against Jamal James and Thomas Dulorme), was excited for the opportunity to face a living legend, even if he too had to change things up by going from the right-handed Maidana to the southpaw Pacquiao.

"I don't regret it," Pacquiao said of facing Ugas on short notice. "That's boxing. I am a fighter."

The pro-Pacquiao crowd of 17,438 turned out to cheer for him in the first major Las Vegas arena fight since the pandemic began. But when it was over, there was no wild cheering, just surprise and a sense of sadness and finality when Ugas celebrated the victory that very well may have sent Pacquiao into retirement.

"In the future, you may not see Manny Pacquiao in the ring," Pacquiao said during a somber post-fight news conference. "I don't know. Let me rest first, relax and make a decision if I'll continue to fight or not."

He did volunteer that he was closer to retirement than returning, although anything said in the immediate aftermath of a fight should be taken with a grain of salt.

"Right now, probably thinking about retirement – 60-40," Pacquiao said.

PATRICK T. FALLON

There had been much discussion ahead of the event that, win or lose, Pacquiao, a senator in the Philippines, would call it a career because of the probability he would run for president of his country. The election is in May, and although Pacquiao time and again professed his undying love for boxing, he also said he feels he has a higher calling to public service as a way to help the many poor – as he once was – in his country.

Pacquiao (62-8-2, 39 KOs) still had the same fighting spirit he has always had, but Father Time remains undefeated. At age 42, after such a long and glorious 26-year career – 72 fights and 498 rounds in all, many of the most punishing variety – and a long layoff, Pacquiao just wasn't as sharp as usual. He seemed to lack the usual snap on his punches and fought only in spurts. His legs, usually the first thing to go on an aging fighter, just weren't there like they'd always been.

Pacquiao was game and quick, but he forced his offense, was hampered by leg cramps and couldn't find his range vs. Ugas.

Pacquiao said that he was hampered by cramping in both legs.

"I want to do my plan, but my two legs were cramping. I could not move around," Pacquiao said. "I am not making excuses. [In my] early days, I would move around and outbox him, but this time my two legs were hurting me in the second round to the 12th round. But I am not making excuses. I tried countering him. So, that's boxing."

He attributed his leg issues to "too much hard work, training. I run in the mountains. I don't know."

Then he added what everybody probably was thinking: "We're not young anymore."

Whatever Pacquiao's issues, the 35-year-old Ugas (27-4, 12 KOs), a 2008 Cuban Olympic bronze medalist with a long amateur career, was nonetheless the fresher fighter and the bigger, more physical man. He wore Pacquiao down with looping right hands that Pacquiao had a hard time picking up. Even though Pacquiao threw more than double the number of punches as Ugas (815-405), Ugas landed more (151-130) and at a much higher percentage (37-16). Pacquiao had a hard time penetrating his high guard with clean punches, and Ugas slowed him down with a consistent body attack.

"My trainer, Ismael Salas, and I had a plan," Ugas said through an interpreter. "We were going to move him around; we were going to use the jab and keep him off-balance. That was the whole game plan."

The fight never really found an offensive flow, although there were some good exchanges, such as in the sixth round when Pacquiao connected with an uppercut and Ugas responded with two good right hands. There were plenty of close rounds, but whenever Pacquiao landed anything, the crowd erupted. But Ugas was steady with his right hands, and they made an impression on the judges. All three had it 57-57 after the sixth round, but Ugas won five of the final six rounds on two scorecards and four of the final six on the third.

He was pulling away, but he made sure of it by closing the show with a one-sided 12th round in which he battered Pacquiao with rights and opened a cut near his left eye.

"The right hand was a shot I had planned to use on Manny," Ugas said. "It kept working, so I kept using it."

When the final bell rang, they both threw their hands up in victory, but Pacquiao, whose face was noticeably marked, didn't seem surprised by the outcome.

"Manny had trouble reaching Ugas," Roach said. "Manny was not able to solve Ugas' height and reach advantage."

A half-hour later, after Ugas had addressed the media in his post-fight news conference, Pacquiao joined him. Ugas was all smiles, but Pacquiao was wearing dark glasses to hide the cuts and bruises and his battered eyes.

The inevitable questions came about his boxing future. He was thoughtful and quite obviously speaking from his big heart.

"As long as I live in this world, I want to leave a legacy, not only being a good fighter but I want to leave a legacy as an inspiration to everybody inside and outside the ring," Pacquiao said. "I am a public servant. I want to help people. Even my own money I give back to the people. That's my mission.

"Material things in this world, you can't bring that to the grave. When our lives are finished in this world, we can take nothing. We came into this world naked and we will depart naked, just remember that. This sport, it is my passion. That's why I'm still here and keep on fighting at the age of 42. I enjoyed it, but sometimes you have to think about the response of your body."

Pacquiao's ultimate decision may not come until sometime in September, when he plans to announce whether he will run for president of the Philippines. If the fight was indeed the end of his boxing career, he has the utmost respect from Ugas.

"He's a legend, one of the greatest fighters that ever lived," said Ugas, who figures to have major fights ahead of him in the talent-rich welterweight division that is largely controlled by PBC. "I'll always respect him, not only as a great fighter but outside the ring. I also admire that he fights for his country, as I do.

"I want to thank Manny Pacquiao for giving me this moment in the ring. I told you, I am the champion of the WBA and I showed it. I'm very emotional. A lot of people say Cubans can't win the big fight. So, I'm very proud that I got this win for Cuba and showed what we are all about."

If Pacquiao walks away, he'll do so as a record-setting phenomenon – one of the greatest fighters to ever put on gloves, the greatest Asian fighter and perhaps the greatest southpaw. Pacquiao, with tremendous speed, power and a palpable joy for combat, rose from abject poverty to beloved global icon with numerous significant accomplishments:

- World titles in a record eight divisions (flyweight and junior featherweight to junior middleweight).
- World titles in a record four decades (1990s, 2000s, 2010s, 2020s).
- The only fighter to be the lineal champion in five weight classes (flyweight, featherweight, junior lightweight, junior welterweight and welterweight).
- Three-time Ring and Boxing Writers Association of America fighter of the year (2006, 2008, 2009) and 2000s fighter of the decade from both.
- Participated in the highest-grossing boxing event ever, some $650 million, in his long-awaited 2015 mega welterweight unification fight with Floyd Mayweather, which broke every conceivable revenue record, including biggest gate and best-selling pay-per-view.
- Oldest fighter to win a welterweight title when he beat Thurman.

Pacquiao would build on the big win over Ledwaba with a string of tremendous victories, several over eventual Hall of Famers, which catapulted him to superstardom. The first was his upset 11th-round stoppage of Marco Antonio Barrera for the Ring/lineal featherweight crown in 2003, but so many more followed.

There was a memorable trilogy he won 2-1 against Erik Morales; another win over Barrera; an all-time great four-fight series he won 2-1-1 against Juan Manuel Marquez; a trilogy he won 2-1 over Timothy Bradley Jr., with the loss in the first fight one of the most controversial decisions ever.

Pacquiao's 2008 to 2011 hit list was as impressive a run as there has been in boxing history. It was a devastating nine-fight stretch that saw him beat a who's who of his time and win titles in five more divisions.

He outpointed Marquez in their second fight to win the junior lightweight title; knocked out David Diaz for a lightweight title; moved up two divisions to welterweight and beat down and retired heavy favorite Oscar De La Hoya in his career-defining victory; returned to junior welterweight to knock Ricky Hatton unconscious for the junior welterweight title; went back to welterweight and stopped Miguel Cotto to take his title; defended against Joshua Clottey; authored a one-sided, face-breaking distance annihilation of Antonio Margarito to win a title in his eighth weight class at junior middleweight; and then made welterweight defenses against Shane Mosley and Marquez in their third fight.

Pacquiao also overcame significant lows. After Marquez knocked him out cold in the sixth round of their epic fourth fight in 2012, many thought Pacquiao would retire. Instead, he reeled off three consecutive wins before the points loss to Mayweather, against whom he was hampered by a torn rotator cuff.

Wins against Bradley and then Jessie Vargas for another welterweight title followed before he was written off again after losing by controversial decision to Jeff Horn in a fight Pacquiao seemed to clearly win but got busted up and didn't look very good. Again, Pacquiao wasn't finished. He returned with a vengeance after a year off to stop Lucas Matthysse in 2018 and then convincingly outpointed Adrien Broner and Thurman in 2019 before losing to Ugas.

This time, however, it doesn't appear there is another comeback in the cards.

"I'm a little bit worried about it," Roach said of Pacquiao fighting on. "He's boxed for a long time and he's my best customer I've ever had, the best guy, the best fighter. I hate to see the day he retires, but this could be it. He didn't have a great performance. We'll see what Manny decides."

Pacquiao, using tissues to dab at the blood under his sunglasses, may not have made his decision official, but he sure sounded like he was done.

"I might have finished my career in boxing, but this is my statement to all boxing fans: People all over the world, the most important thing is what we have done for others, how we can help them and how we can help each other, especially in this pandemic," Pacquiao said. "People are hungry, starving, experiencing difficult times. We should help them and show our love for them.

"We must love each other and help each other, not only by words but by actions.

"Thank you to all of you – press, media, the fans, the promoters. Thank you, to all of you. Thank you, boxing." RING

ETHAN MILLER

Both fighters' faces bore battle marks at the end of the fight, but Pacquiao got the worst of their exchanges down the stretch.

CAUTION AHEAD

ANTHONY JOSHUA'S DEFENSE AGAINST **OLEKSANDR USYK** IS SEEN BY SOME AS AN EASY DETOUR FOR THE BRITISH HEAVYWEIGHT STAR, BUT THE FORMER CRUISERWEIGHT CHAMP FROM UKRAINE IS NOT TO BE UNDERESTIMATED

By **Gareth A Davies**

Anthony Joshua is testing the waters on just how far he can go as a heavyweight – and testing himself to the limit. Thirty-two next month, he has three of the four heavyweight sanctioning-body belts and riches beyond his wildest dreams growing up with his mother in Watford, a satellite town 30 minutes north of London. Ever since claiming the IBF title five years ago against Charles Martin, it has been a steep learning curve, and the boxer-puncher remains a work in progress. »

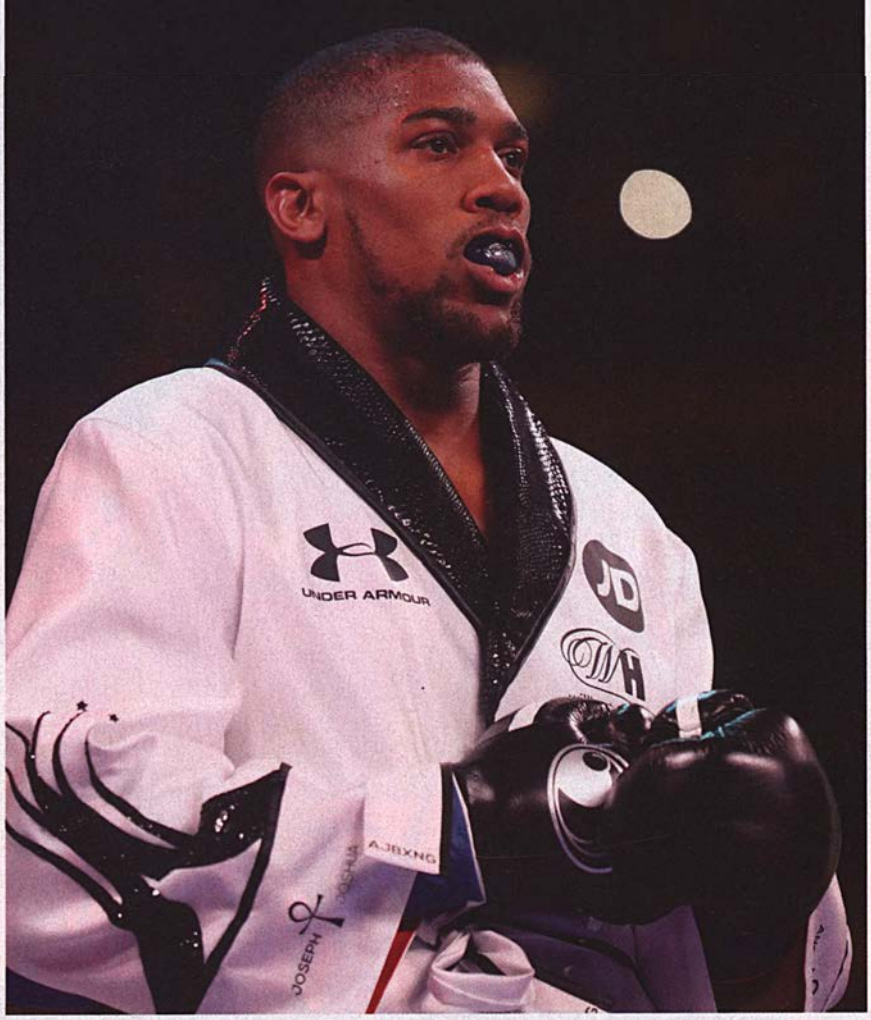
AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

CAUTION AHEAD

Consider this: Joshua went from a developing heavyweight after winning Olympic gold in London in 2012 to a mainstream star. There was no extensive, decorated amateur pedigree behind him. He has been thrust into the deep waters and at the same time lives out his fighting life in the glare of huge mainstream attention. And, of course, his endgame would be to claim victory over the other British heavyweight star, Tyson Fury, who hovers between praising "AJ" and calling him "a dosser" (roughly meaning "lazy bum") whom he will school in the ring.

The fascination around Joshua is that you can see him reaching for self-belief at times. Not in himself, just in knowing that he is still learning. He's brilliant, destructive, a role model, a bona fide world champion and testament to heart, will and desire. But there are doubts there at times – over strategy or feel – during a fight. His menacing power means that his natural tendency is to let those hands go, but the Andy Ruiz defeat in New York, his U.S. debut and only blemish to date, has left some mental scarring. Only natural. But he got the method right in the second encounter with Ruiz, with the wild abandon having left him. This is a different Joshua now. It is phase two of his heavyweight career.

There is huge mainstream appeal around Joshua, as witnessed when the 60,000 seats at Tottenham Hotspur Football Stadium for his upcoming defense of the IBF, WBA and WBO titles against mandatory WBO challenger Oleksandr Usyk sold out in a matter of hours. Huge, that – a testament to what Joshua brings to both British boxing and the heavyweight division. The bout on Saturday, September 25, will be the first boxing match in a U.K. stadium during the COVID-19 era. That makes it even bigger. It is a fight no one really wanted – we ALL wanted Joshua to face Tyson Fury this year. That is THE FIGHT. THE ONE THE PUBLIC WANTS. THE SHOWDOWN. UNDISPUTED ...



Joshua, 32 in October with a 24-1 record, is at his peak.

But forget it for now. We are simply not getting it. Not yet, anyway.

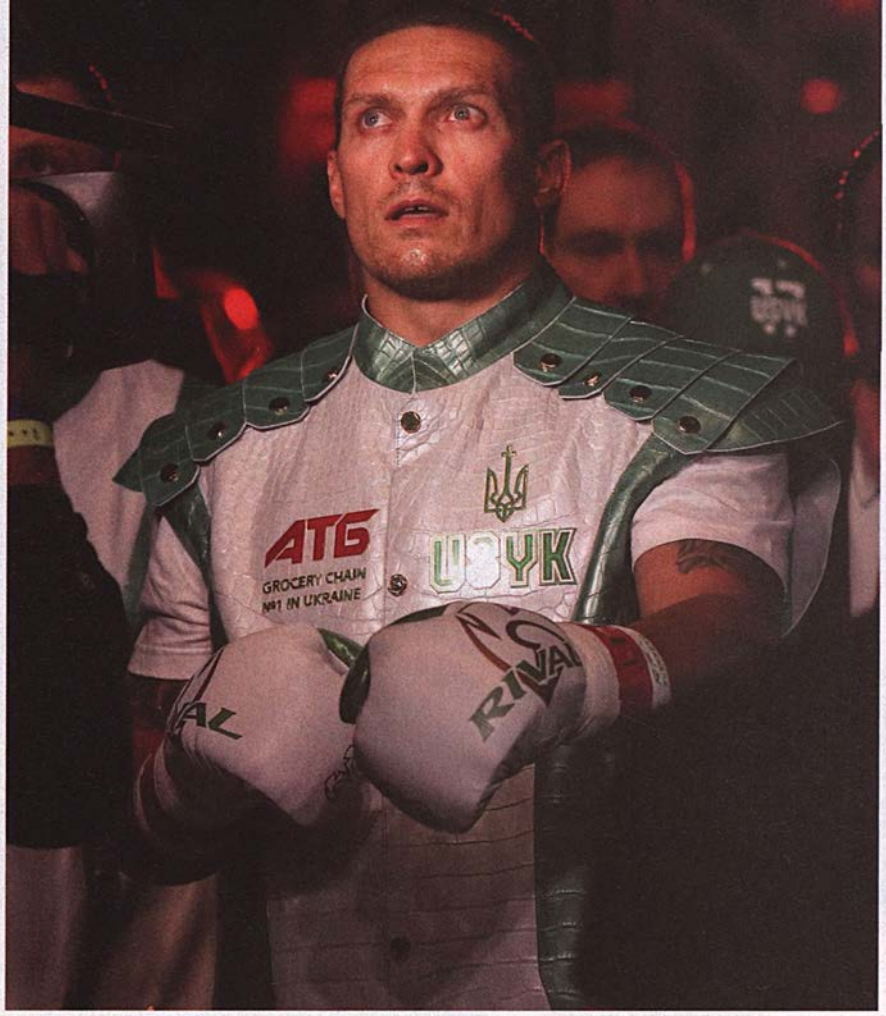
Instead, we have a banana skin fight for Joshua in a giant stadium in north London. Joshua must win – just as Fury must against Deontay Wilder on October 9 in Las Vegas, defending the Ring and WBC crowns – for the excitement to begin again over the pair actually meeting in a ring for all the baubles.

But Joshua-Usyk brings its own intrigue. In a matchup of two Olympic gold medalists from London 2012, Joshua (24-1, 22 KOs) will meet a Ukrainian who is almost three years older and is unbeaten in 18 professional fights (only two of those at heavyweight, mind you).

Joshua, who was in talks to fight for the undisputed heavyweight title with Fury until a contractual arbitration ruling forced Fury to meet Wilder for a third time, has not fought since December 2020, when he stopped IBF mandatory challenger Kubrat Pulev by ninth-round knockout at the SSE Arena.

"I put it all on the line again, and it's time to defend my crown. We are two Olympic gold medalists who have fought our way to the top and never avoided challenges," explained Joshua. "The stadium is exceptional. The atmosphere will be electric. I'm honored to be the first person to fight in such an awe-inspiring venue. The stage is set and I am ready to handle business."

Usyk, who has 13 KOs in his perfect 18-fight resume, moved his aspirations to the heavyweight division after dominating at 200 pounds as the undisputed cruiserweight champion. Thus far, the clever southpaw has stopped Chazz Witherspoon in seven rounds and outpointed Derek Chisora over 12 rounds at The SSE Arena last October. Usyk, often a man of



Usyk wants heavyweight glory following two wins at the weight.

mystery and a joker, said: "The path will be mastered by the walking one." Read what you will into that. The key with Usyk, moreover, is his vast experience – he reportedly earned an astonishing 335-15 record in the amateurs. The problem for him is his size against a very big, strong heavyweight in "AJ."

Eddie Hearn, the chairman of Matchroom Sport, sees it as a massive occasion. "Olympic gold vs. Olympic gold, unified world heavyweight champion vs. undisputed cruiserweight world champion; this one has it all. It's a tough fight, but I think that Usyk will never be a fully-fledged heavyweight – a real heavyweight in terms of size.

"What he will always have is a huge amount of skill. It takes time for people to bed into heavyweight, so put it this way: It would've been a lot easier fight for AJ a year-and-a-half ago. Now Usyk has fought a real heavyweight contender in Chisora. That will actually help him to start to understand what needs to be done. But AJ's a different kind of beast. A good big guy will always beat a good small guy. So we'll see."

Heavyweights such as David Haye and Joe Joyce – the latter fought Usyk in a World Series of Boxing bout (that he lost on points) – concur with Hearn. Haye has predicted that Joshua will knock Usyk out in "devastating" fashion, reasoning that Joshua will employ the jab early and break the smaller fighter down before stopping him. "He's just gonna use his beautiful jab, use his height and reach advantage, use his size and weight advantage and his punch power advantage. His physical athletic advantage, his advantage of being able to receive punches from big heavyweights. He's just better all-round, and it's just gonna be pretty devastating."

Joyce, who knows firsthand how difficult Usyk can be in the ring, sees it slightly differently. "[Usyk] could cause an upset – he's got the potential to – or nick the fight. We'll see, because he's been working on his weight, so maybe his power might be his tactic. We'll have to see what happens, but I'm edging for Joshua, obviously.

Joyce, growing into a contender himself in the division, added: "I think [Joshua] is too big and too strong for Usyk. But I'm not writing off Usyk, because he's so skilled, and he's a great boxer, too."

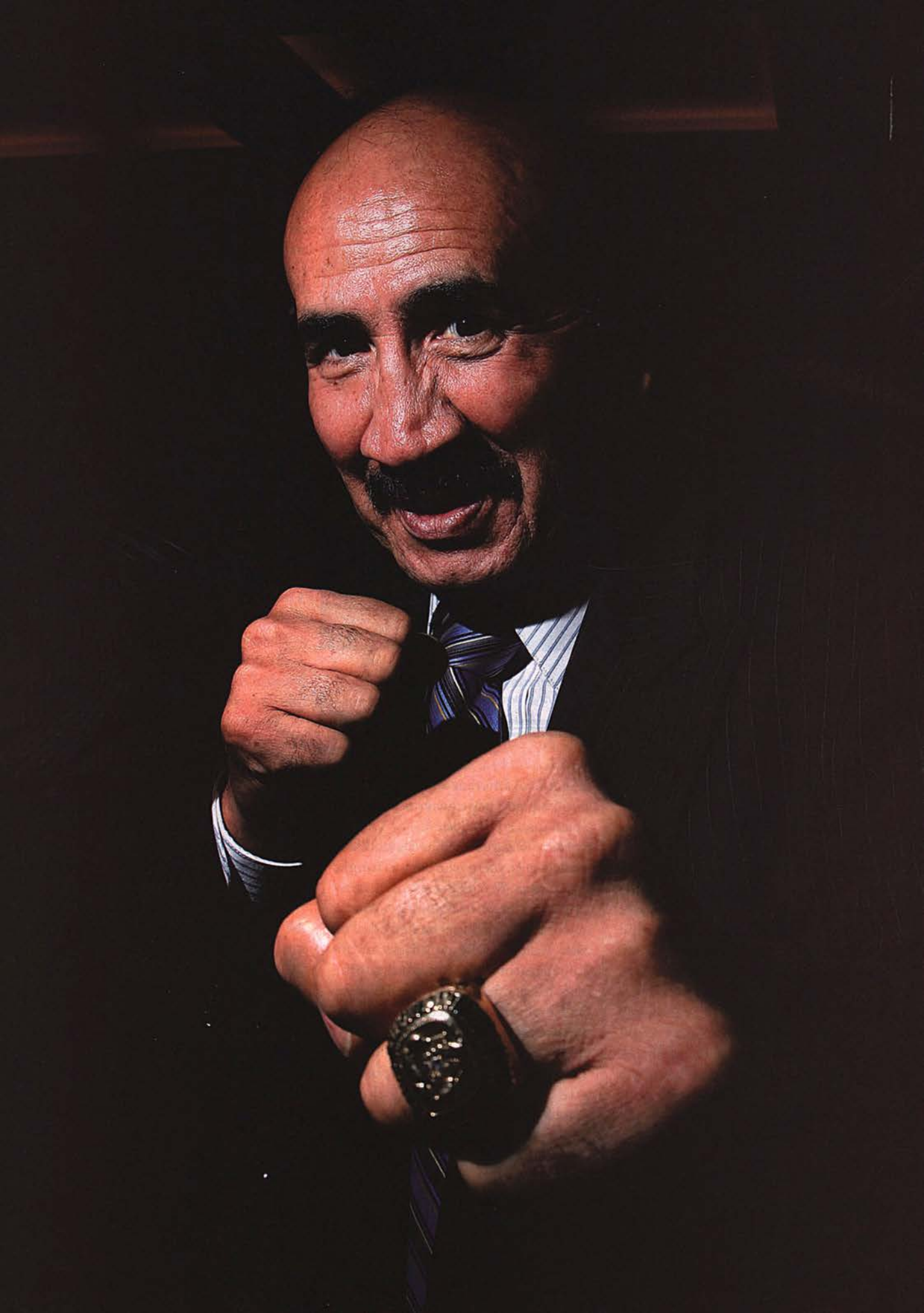
Joyce recalled his five-round WSOB contest with Usyk back in 2012. "He was just levels above me, especially at that time and coming off a gold medal win in London. He's such a skilled fighter. He had 350 amateur bouts or something like that with a high win ratio, and especially with the trainer [Anatoliy] Lomachenko (Vasiliy Lomachenko's father and trainer)."

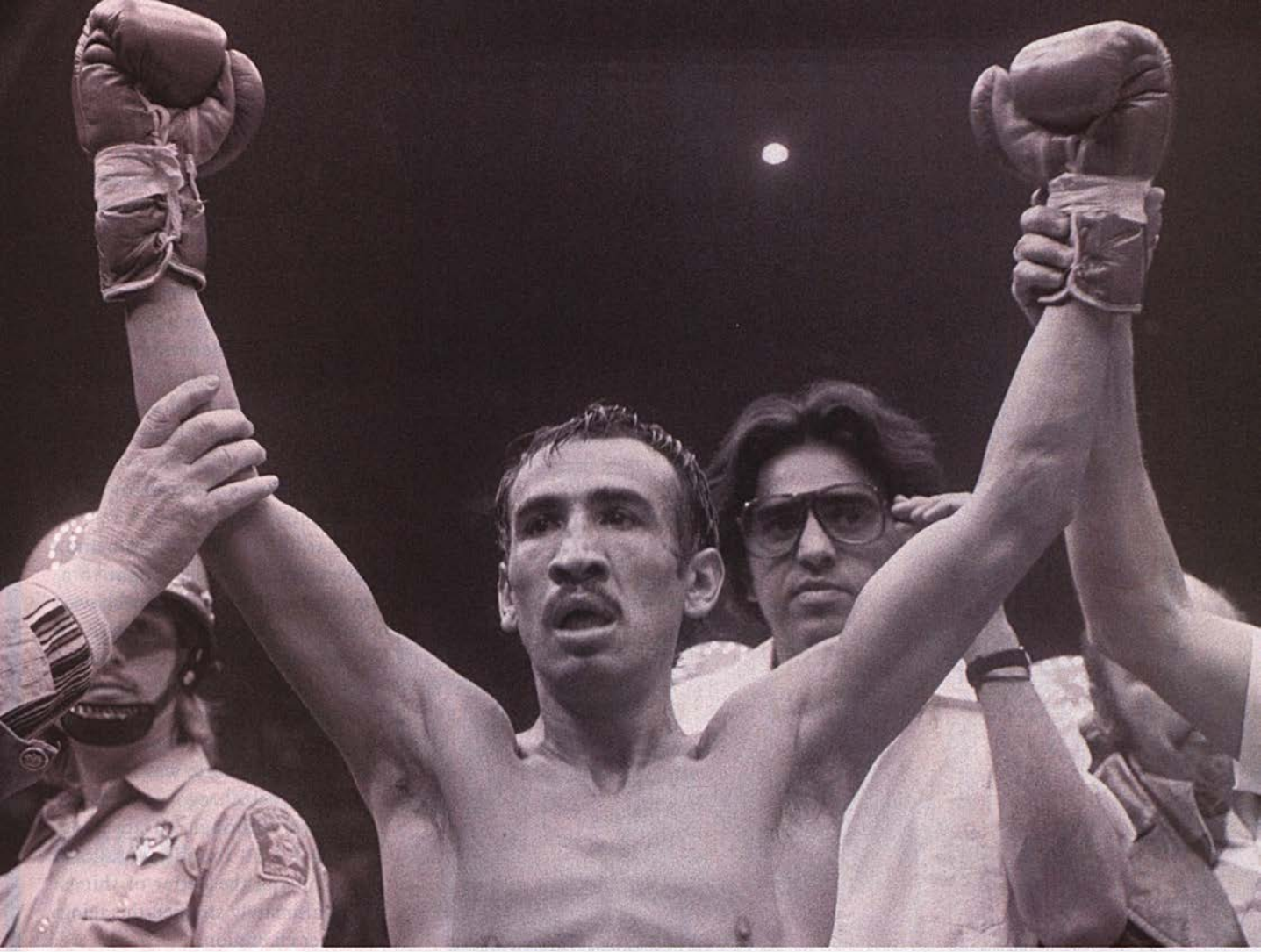
From here, Joshua can win this fight convincingly and lay down a marker for his contest with Fury. Make a statement, even. It will rely on keeping Usyk uncomfortable from the start, using his jab and being explosive. If he stays on Usyk, the Ukrainian will not be able to use his footwork to be elusive or create the angles to get his shots away. Chisora showed how Usyk can be "bullied" by a bigger, aggressive fighter in the first few rounds of their contest.

Usyk is a fox, though, and he will be looking to set traps. Overall, my feeling is that if Usyk is still in there after Round 9, Joshua may have failed in the plan. He is bigger, stronger, hits harder and is devastating at finishing his foes.

I started by saying Joshua doubts himself. We all do at times. If we are human. But prove the doubters wrong and you grow. This could be a fight in which AJ grows. It is that kind of test.

Gareth A Davies is Boxing Correspondent for The London Telegraph.





GREATEST HITS: CARLOS ZARATE

UNIVERSALLY CONSIDERED ONE OF THE GREATEST MEXICAN BOXERS OF ALL TIME, ZARATE WREAKED HAVOC IN THE BANTAMWEIGHT DIVISION DURING ITS GOLDEN ERA OF THE 1970S

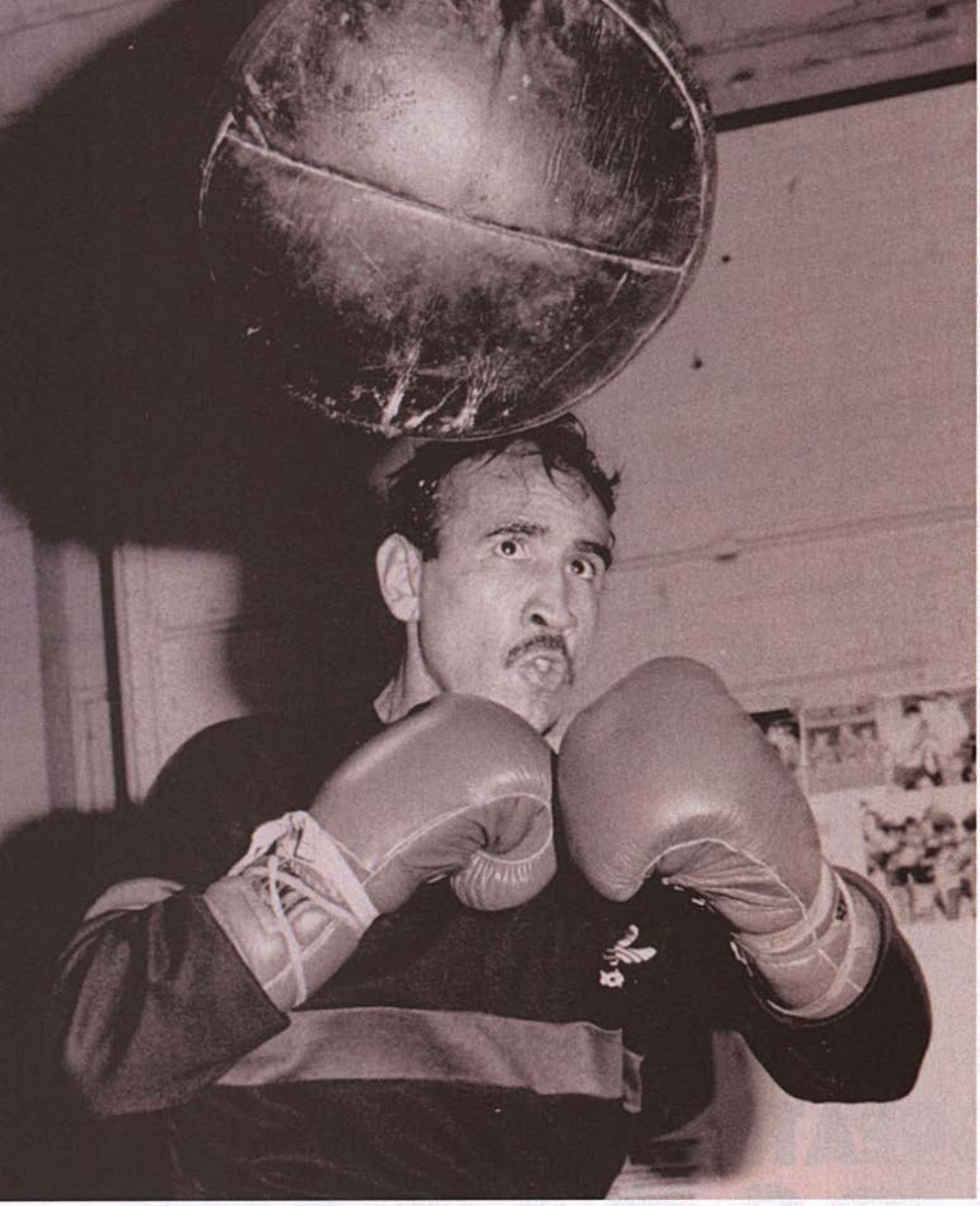
By **Anson Wainwright**

Whether discussing the best bantamweights, knockout artists or the greatest Mexican fighters of all time, Carlos Zarate's name is bound to come up. His four losses only came against the very best and he pretty much knocked out the rest in a 70-fight career that ensured him a first-ballot spot in the International Boxing Hall of Fame.

Zarate was born in Mexico City on May 23, 1951, and split his time between the Ramos Millan and Tepito neighborhoods during his childhood. "The truth is, my boxing skills were developed in Ramos Millan ... it's a very tough place in Mexico," Zarate told The Ring through Victor Silva. "I loved both neighborhoods because I laughed, cried and fell in love in both places. It was tough, but it was good."

Carlos was the youngest in the family and enjoyed fighting, so he started boxing at the local gym when he was 16. It took until he was 18 for his amateur career to really get started.

"I won the [Mexican] Golden Gloves against Eliseo Cosme – he was a two-time national champion," said Zarate, who went 33-3 with 30 knockouts as an amateur. "It was an unbelievable fight."



Zarate puts in the work for a title bout against Jeff Fenech.

At 5-foot-8, Zarate was unusually tall and rangy for the division that would ultimately be his domain, and the heaviness of his hands was even more impressive. He turned pro in February 1970 and made his U.S. debut in the fall of 1974 with 30 fights under his belt – all of them knockout victories.

Zarate was 39-0 with 38 knockouts when he got his first shot at a title in 1976. He was a 3-to-1 betting favorite over WBC bantamweight incumbent Rodolfo Martinez and put a methodical nine-round beating on the defending champion in front of a lively crowd of more than 17,000 at the Forum in Inglewood, California.

After turning back the likes of Paul Ferreri (TKO 12) and Waruinge Nakayama (KO 4), Zarate stopped WBA titleholder Alfonso Zamora (TKO 4) in a non-title bout – the famous "Battle of the Z-Boys." He also fended off challenges from the previously unbeaten Danilo Batista (KO 6) and future titleholder Alberto Davila (TKO 8).

Zarate then stepped up to face WBC junior featherweight beltholder Wilfredo Gomez in October 1978, but it was not to be for the challenger, who lost his undefeated record by fifth-round stoppage.

Zarate returned to the bantamweight division and made his ninth defense before dropping the title to Lupe Pintor (SD 15) under controversial circumstances. Disillusioned by the result, "Canas" drifted away from the sport for more than six years.

He returned, aged 35, but looked like a shadow of his former self in edging past a soft opponent in February 1986. Zarate won 11 more fights in quick succession, shedding his ring rust before challenging a young Jeff Fenech – in Sydney – for the WBC junior featherweight title in October 1987.

Zarate had a few moments, but the fight was brought to a premature close after Fenech was left worse for wear by a clash of heads. Ahead on points after four rounds, the Australian retained his belt.

Fenech then stepped up in weight, and Zarate was matched with Daniel Zaragoza to fill the vacancy. Although Zarate hung tough for 10 rounds, Zaragoza was having the better of things and ultimately stopped the aging former champion.

Zarate retired with a record of 66-4 (63 KOs) and was inducted into the IBHOF in 1994.

"I'm really happy," he said. "I'm really happy that people still know my name and are still talking about the great Carlos Zarate, even if I finished fighting long ago.

"There were a lot of mistakes, and I know that, but all of them were mine. That's not something I can change now. I believe I could be the best Mexican fighter if I hadn't made those mistakes. I did a lot of great things, but I could have been even bigger.

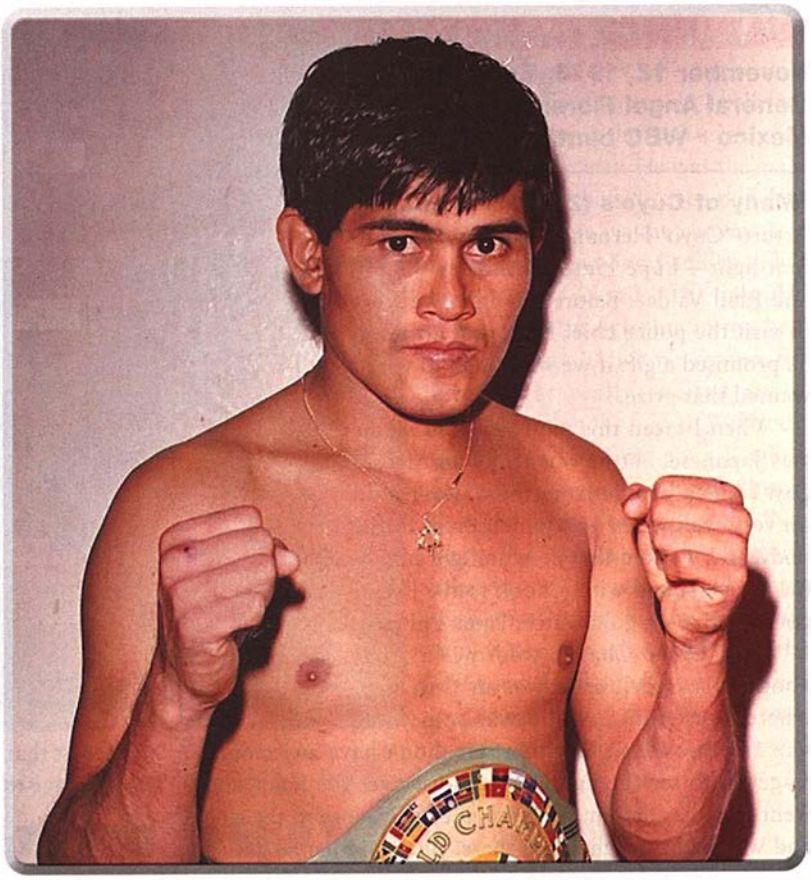
"I have my family with me and I make enough money to live with no worries. I'm happy with what I am."

Zarate, now 70, lives in the Villa Coapa area of Mexico City and has eight children, 11 grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

The former titleholder enjoyed looking back on his career and reminiscing about six career-defining performances for the readers of The Ring.

VICTOR RAMIREZ

January 30, 1974, Arena Coliseo, Mexico City • Non-title bout



"At that time in Mexico, there were two days for boxing, Wednesday and Saturday, and of course Saturday was the [larger] main event. At that time, I was already the main event on Wednesday; it was big for me. My opponent was [former bantamweight champion] Chucho Castillo's sparring partner. [Ramirez] was really, really tough, and he was very well-trained. He was really well-prepared, and it was a tough fight.

"I had a lot of steps to get the chance for a world title. I had 24 straight knockout wins, and then I fought Victor Ramirez and it was a unanimous decision. It was the first time I thought [my] head was going to explode. My hands were all swollen; it was painful. I had a big headache. I had to take a cold shower to get rid of everything from that fight. It was a big opponent."

RESULT: ZARATE UD 10

RODOLFO MARTINEZ

May 8, 1976, Forum, Inglewood, California • WBC bantamweight title

"Rodolfo was a great champion. Mexico had the best bantamweight boxers at that time; eight or nine of the best bantamweights were Mexican: Ruben Olivares, me, Rafael Herrera, Chucho Castillo, Jose Medel, Romeo Anaya, Julio Guerrero. It was the mecca of the bantamweight division. It was one of my best training camps in Miraflores, Chalco, Mexico. I had a lot of hope for becoming a world champion at that moment.

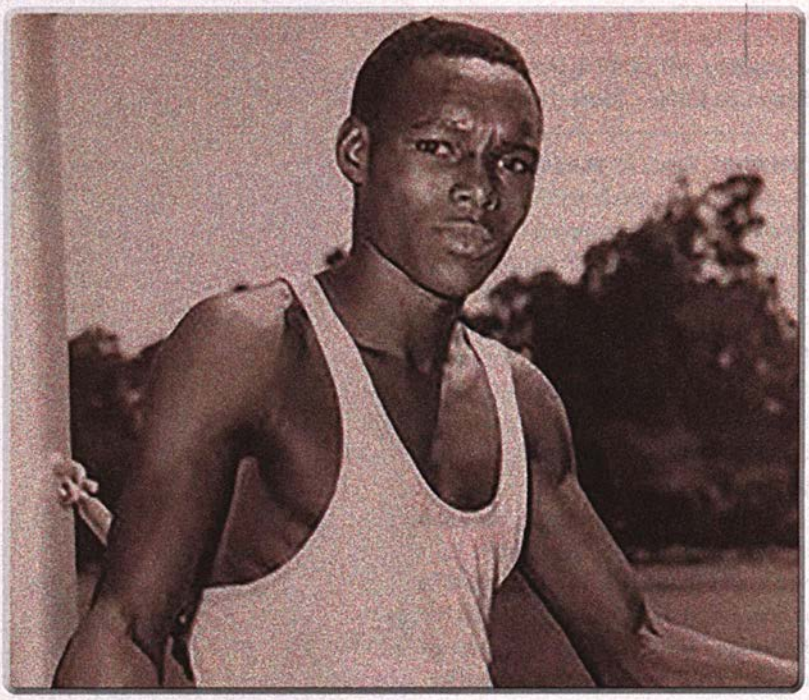
"When I knocked him down [in Round 5], I felt I was better in speed, power and resistance. I was superior in everything. I got the confidence, and I knew at that moment I was going to be a champion. In the ninth, I did what I had to do.

"Everybody knew me, and it was fantastic because everybody cheered me everywhere I went. I was very well-known after I beat Martinez. It was a celebration in all of Mexico City. All my neighbors from Ramos Millan went to celebrate with me at the airport, and then they fixed a meal in a deputy's house. He used to help me a lot. It was amazing. All the people I knew since I was a kid, they were there with me."

RESULT: ZARATE KO 9

WARUINGE NAKAYAMA

November 13, 1976, Estadio General Angel Flores, Culiacan, Mexico • WBC bantamweight title



"Many of Cuyo's (Zarate's manager, Arturo 'Cuyo' Hernandez) fighters went to that fight – Lupe Pintor, 'Bazooka' Limon and Raul Valdez. Before the fight, we went to visit the police chief from that area and he promised a gift if we win. I had to win; I wanted that prize.

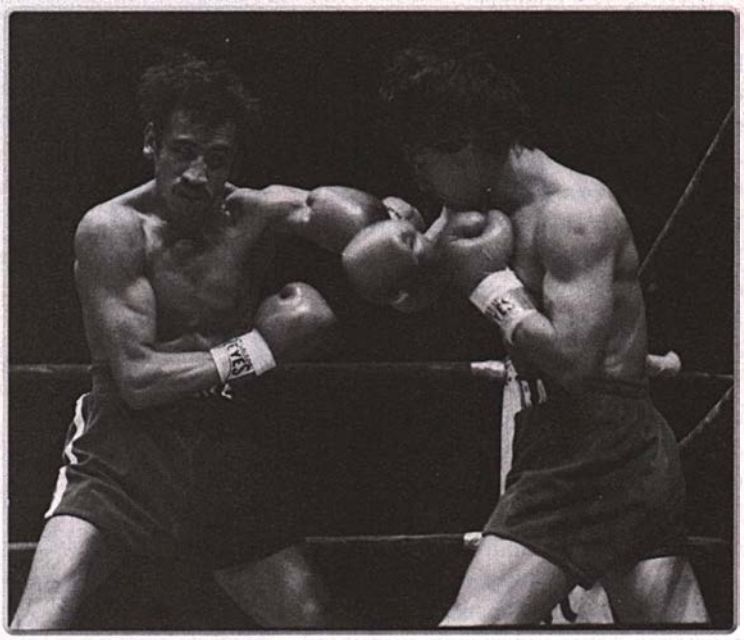
"When I faced this guy, they told me he was Japanese, but he was really an African guy. I knew people from there don't hold on very well when you punch them to the body, so I worked that area and got him in the fourth round with a hook to the liver. I got my prize – a gold watch, Patek Philippe.

"Julio Cesar Chavez told me [a story about this fight], as it was in Culiacan, where he is from ... Julio was something like 14 years old at that time. He didn't have any money to get in to see the fight. He jumped over the fence and went into the stadium. He even got really close to the ring and watched the fight from there. Julio told me he got so excited at that fight, that it was his turning point where he said, 'I have to be a world champion.'"

RESULT: ZARATE KO 4

ALFONSO ZAMORA

April 23, 1977, Forum, Inglewood, Los Angeles, California • Non-title bout



"Everybody wanted that fight; everybody was looking forward to it. We were the best champions at that moment at bantamweight. I was from the WBC and Zamora from the WBA. We were both undefeated, Zamora was an Olympic silver medal winner.

"There were a lot of things happening around the fight. I was sad because there was no title on the line. I wanted to fight for both titles. Cuyo said, 'Remain calm; you will win anyway.' It was a great purse. Usually I signed for a fight for $100,000. At some point I believe Cuyo Hernandez took advantage of that. He said, 'Just sign the contract and forget about it.' I believe he told the promoters, 'We're going to sign the contract for $100,000 and you're going to give me $100,000 more not on the contract.'

"The crowd was divided; some cheered for me, some cheered for Zamora. Just before the fight began, an electric transformer burned the ceiling. There was a lot of noise because it was not working. And then a karate guy came into the ring; he wanted to fight both of us.

"I was better. I knocked Zamora out in the fourth. It was a great fight. I think I didn't disappoint; I showed I was better. After the fight was over, Zamora's father tried to punch Cuyo Hernandez. It was a very funny fight. There were a lot of things that amazed the fans, and it was a memorable fight."

RESULT: ZARATE TKO 4

WILFREDO GOMEZ

October 28, 1978, Coliseo Roberto Clemente, San Juan, Puerto Rico • WBC junior featherweight title

"I was training really hard, but five days before the fight, I went out for a run and it was raining, so I got a cold. I felt really bad about it. I was physically drained and I didn't have any physical conditioning. I asked Cuyo to cancel the fight, but [I was told by Hernandez and Gomez's manager, Yamil Chade, that] because of the agreement, I would have to pay three times the amount I was supposed to get for the purse if I canceled. It was some kind of threat from them. For that reason, I fought.

"I was 300 grams, maybe an ounce and a half [overweight]. They took me to the steam room for that. I was feeling sick and the steam room was the worst thing to do. I couldn't win that night against anybody. I felt really bad. I had a fever.

"Many people saw what happened. A very famous singer, Marco Antonio Muniz, was having a show in Puerto Rico at that moment, and years afterward I met him and he said, 'I was there. They put something in your meal.' I believe I was meant to lose that fight because of the managers.

"I have no respect for [Gomez], no way. He was the main part of this and took advantage of this. He even punched me when I was on the canvas, and he knew my condition and he didn't care. He just went for the fight. He didn't want to fight me in my best shape, so no, I have no respect for him. I was really excited about Salvador Sanchez and Wilfredo Gomez. In the first round, when Salvador dropped him and almost knocked Gomez out, I thought, 'No, please don't knock him out; give him a hard time.' He was a good fighter with good skills, but he was a big mouth, too. He talked too much, he offended the fighters and he didn't do the right thing with me. He took advantage and that was not fair, so I am glad he lost to Salvador Sanchez."

RESULT: GOMEZ TKO 5

LUPE PINTOR

June 3, 1979, Caesars Palace, Las Vegas • WBC bantamweight title

"We weren't special friends, but we weren't enemies. He's four years younger than me, so when he got into the gym, he looked at me all the time and said he wanted to be like me; he loved the way I boxed and he wanted to learn. We talked; we got along. We sparred sometimes and he was inexperienced, and I took advantage of that and punched him really hard, even when they said take it easy.

"Then, after that, he lost a lot of fights. But he got a good win and he became famous, and because of that we fought. It was a great fight. You can tell who won just by looking at each fighter's face. His face was a mess and my face was clean. I never agreed that I lost that fight. I know so many people in boxing that keep telling me I won that fight. It was really sad.

"I went to see Don Jose Sulaiman and asked him, crying, for the rematch, and Don Jose said yes. But right after that, Lupe Pintor had a motorcycle accident and broke his jaw and some ribs. It took a lot of time and it never happened. I was so sad that I thought about retiring from boxing. I didn't want to go back. I took my time, and as time went by, suddenly I wasn't fighting anymore." RING

RESULT: PINTOR SD 15

Victor Silva, subdirector of the World Boxing Council, helped coordinate and translate this feature; The Ring appreciates his assistance. Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk, and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright.

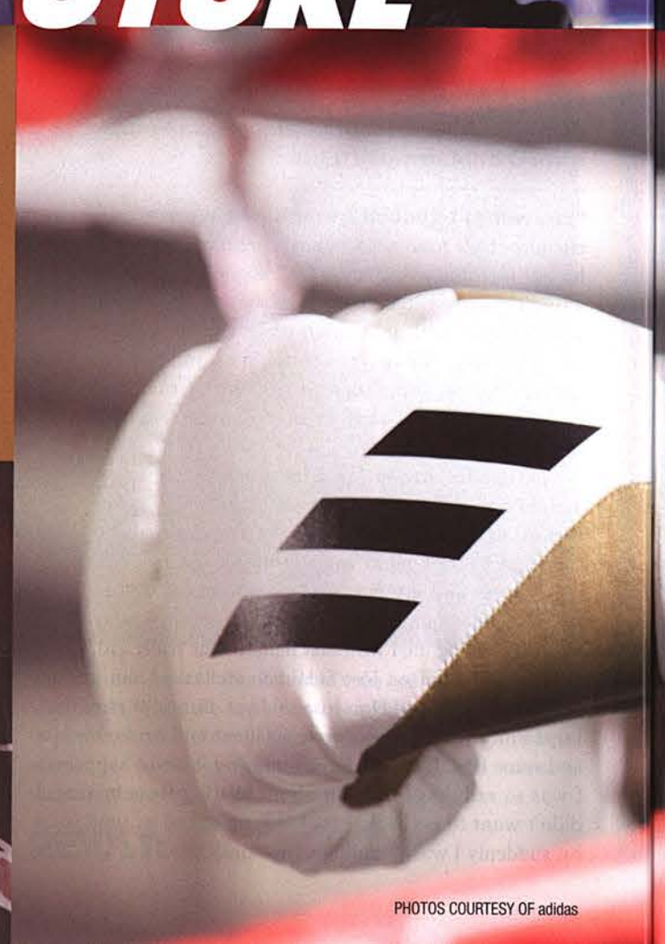
MAKING THE CHANGE FOR A BETTER FUTURE

A Q&A WITH CHRISTOPHE DESSALLES

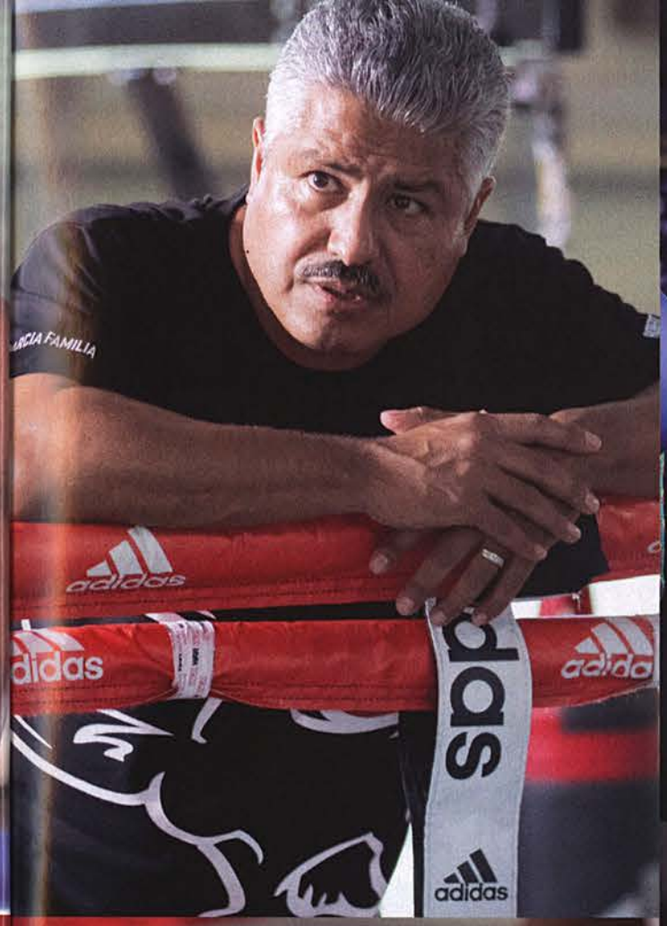
Innovation and sustainability. That's the goal of adidas, and the man leading the mission for the boxing branch of the multinational sportswear corporation is Christophe Dessalles, managing director of Double-D/adidas Boxing, which designs and manufactures all of adidas' combat sports equipment and apparel.

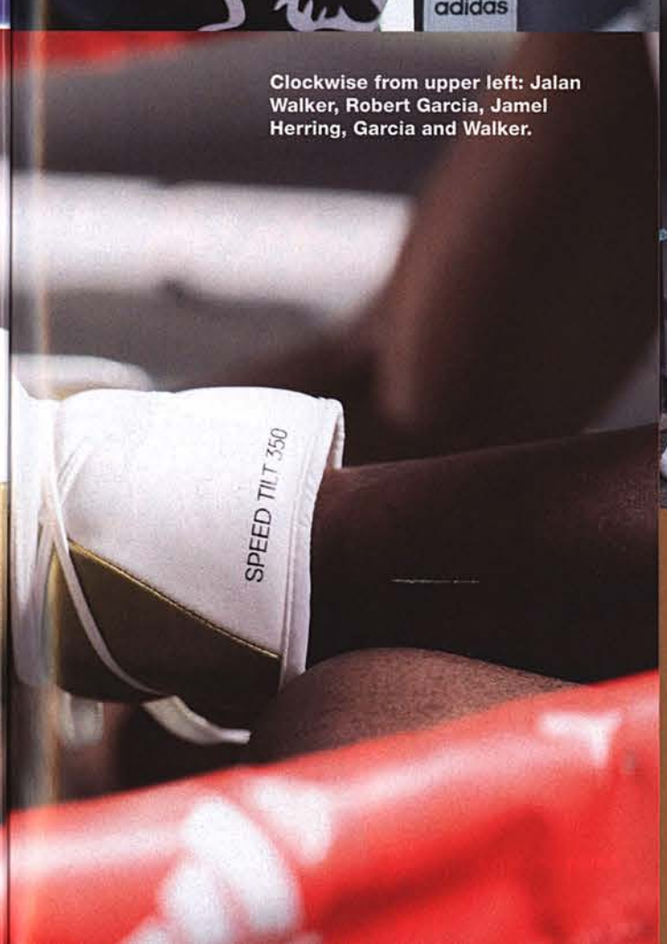
The company's first big step in protecting the combat athlete and the environment is the Speed 350 Tilt PRO Boxing Glove, which was developed with a patented tilt design that maximizes the fighter's hand support and strength by allowing proper knuckle alignment, and is also made with sustainable materials, including cactus leather.

The design of the Tilt 350 was developed in collaboration with hand specialists, but all of the adidas Boxing equipment and apparel are tested in a very special lab located in Riverside, California – the Robert Garcia Boxing Academy, which is home to four-division titleholder Mikey Garcia, former unified junior welterweight champ Jose Ramirez, welterweight contender Vergil Ortiz Jr. and junior bantamweight standout Joshua Franco, as well as several up-and-comers.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF adidas





Clockwise from upper left: Jalan Walker, Robert Garcia, Jamel Herring, Garcia and Walker.

MAKING THE CHANGE FOR A BETTER FUTURE

Robert Garcia, a two-time trainer-of-the-year award winner, has spent his entire life in boxing, first as a combatant and now as a coach and mentor. His feedback and the input of his fighters is vital to the continued development of adidas Boxing equipment.

In late June, The Ring was on hand as four adidas ambassadors, including MMA legend Anderson Silva and WBO 130-pound titleholder Jamel Herring, worked out with the new Speed 350 Tilt PRO Boxing Gloves during a photo/video shoot inside the RGBA. The combat sports veterans were joined by two boxing newcomers – 19-year-old Jalan Walker (8-0-1, 7 KOs), a featherweight prospect from South Central L.A., and 22-year-old Eric Priest (4-0, 3 KOs), a Texas-born middleweight who now makes his home in Hollywood and moonlights as a model.

The Speed 350 Tilt PRO Boxing Gloves will be available in the U.S. in October and can be purchased at the official adidas Boxing website: usboxing.net.

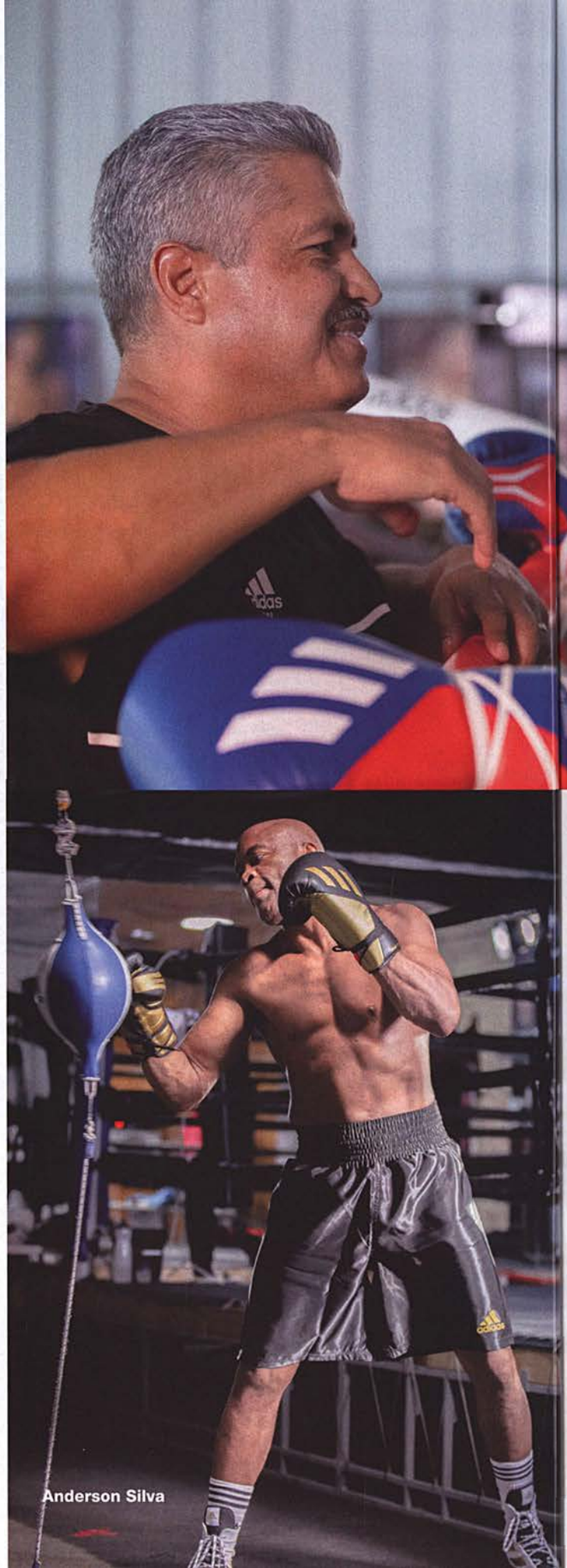
The Ring caught up with Dessalles to discuss the new glove and adidas' #CombatForChange mission.

How long have you (and adidas Boxing/Double-D) been on this journey to create gloves and equipment that protects the environment and the athlete?

Our journey to create sustainable products started a few years ago and is aligned with adidas International's strategy. We are working towards a goal to use recycled polyester in all our products by 2024, which means no PVC (polyvinyl chloride, which is a toxic chemical), no dirty polyester, and in this journey our goal is to innovate with sustainable materials to protect the environment. In boxing, our first step is with cactus leather made in Mexico. We have been working with the company for over 18 months to develop a unique sustainable material for boxing equipment, one which answers all boxers' needs. This is only our first step as we have several other exciting sustainable projects in the pipeline.

Is it satisfying/exciting to finally be able to announce the glove innovations and Tilt Technology to the combat sports community and to the general public?

We are very excited, as all boxers and coaches who have tried the Tilt glove have been blown away by this concept and technology, which we have registered successfully in 38 countries worldwide. They all told us that they could feel the difference when using the Tilt gloves. We know that with Tilt we have something very special which will help all boxers from all levels in their path to success – sustaining dreams! Again, the Tilt launch is only the first step for 2022. We have many more innovations around Tilt, which will excite the entire combat sports community.



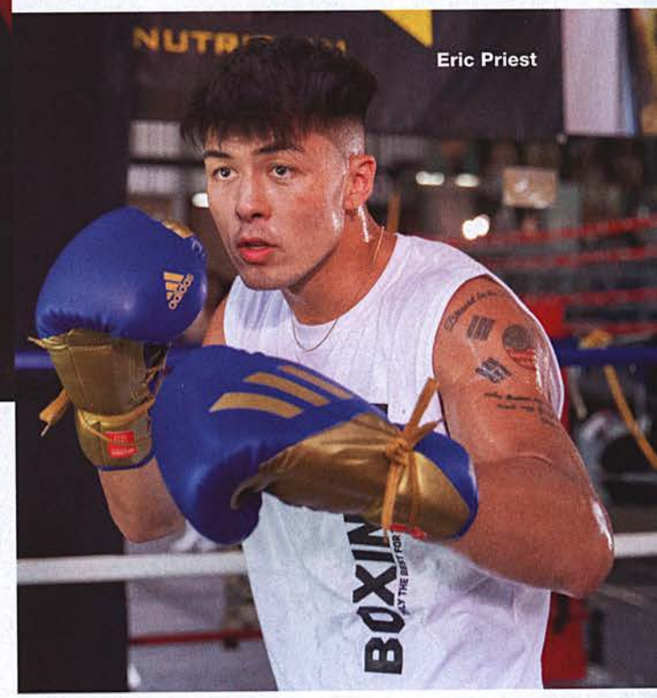
Garcia with Hector Tanajara

Anderson Silva

PHOTOS COURTESY OF adidas

As a brand, our commitment is to help the environment whilst making the best products for the athletes and boxing enthusiasts. When you look at the benefits of cactus leather vs. PU (polyurethane leather) or (animal) leather it speaks for itself. Using cactus leather helps the athlete, the planet and the human race. Here's a few facts to remind everybody of its benefit:

The cactus plant doesn't use much water, its metabolism protects water, it is good for the air and good for the soil it's planted in. Cactus leather is cruelty-free, organic, biodegradable and free of phthalates, toxic chemicals and PVC.


Eric Priest

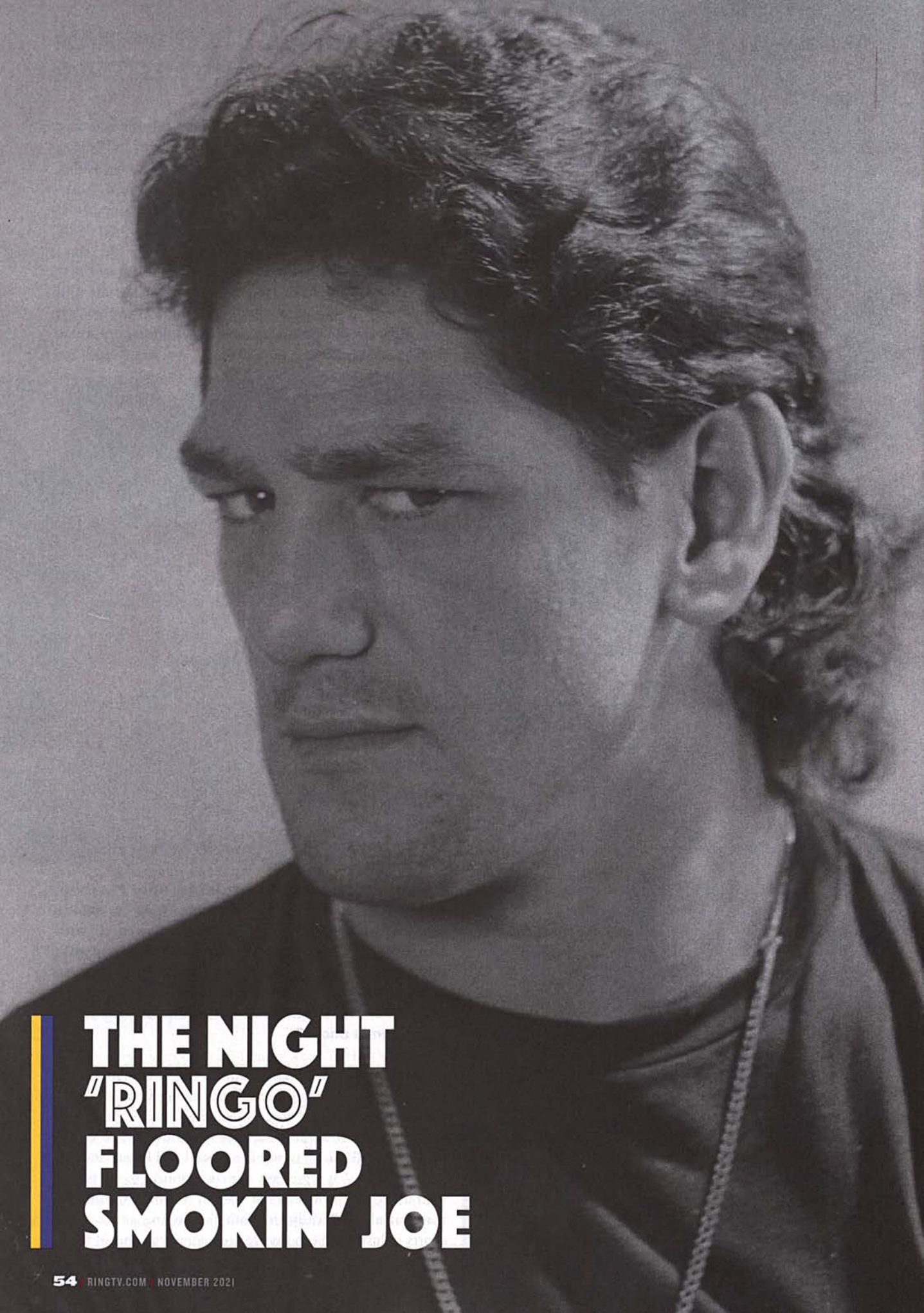
How important is the feedback from veteran trainers and gyms – such as Robert Garcia and his Boxing Academy – to the development of equipment like the Tilt glove? How long has Garcia been an adidas ambassador?

It is vital in our pursuit to create great products that we develop all our products with top athletes and coaches like Robert. For the Tilt development or our latest boxing shoes, which will also be made from sustainable materials, we have developed them with boxers from several countries and continents to ensure that we answer their needs to be the best that they can be. After all, our motto is "Only the best for the athletes." Robert has been part of the team for the past couple of years and a vital player in providing feedback, advice and support in the development of our products. Our collaboration actually started with the Fight Glove we developed with (three-division champion) Abner Mares and is now used by world champions, including Jamel Herring.

I think most boxers – and even folks who just occasionally put on gloves to work out – will understand the concept of the Tilt Technology and how it supports the wrist and proper knuckle alignment, but they may not grasp the significance of the cactus leather. What are the advantages to using it instead of animal skin or synthetic materials?

Do you think combat athletes and exercise enthusiasts who are not environmentally conscious will come around and be more aware of and supportive of sustainability and eco-friendly products by using this new line of gloves and becoming more familiar with how we impact the environment? Is that what the #CombatForChange campaign is about?

We are humble and trying to launch the best boxing products to help the athletes and make them in a very sustainable and ethical way. We could also talk about where our products are made, as all our factories worldwide are SEA approved, which stands for "Social and Environmental Accountability." It represents our commitment to the people who make our products, not only in the most sustainable way but also ethically! In both the boxing and combat sports industry, we can say we are a long way ahead!



THE NIGHT "RINGO" FLOORED SMOKIN' JOE

OSCAR BONAVENA'S FIRST TUSSLE WITH JOE FRAZIER WAS INDICATIVE OF THE RUGGED CONTENDER'S CAREER AND LIFE, WHICH WAS RIFE WITH MAYHEM, NEAR MISSES AND TRAGEDY

By **Patrick Connor**

Oscar Bonavena died before I was born. Until I wrote this book, I knew "Ringo" only as a stubborn opponent in the ring and a rascal outside of it. Both things are true, but they're a small part of a remarkably large story.

At the end of his boxing career, Bonavena got involved with Joe Conforte and his wife, Sally – owners of a brothel in Reno, Nevada – and the fighter eventually got gunned down. That much is well-known to most boxing fans. Additional details about the events leading to Bonavena's death, however, are much more obscure.

The people of Reno were well aware of Joe Conforte. He ran brothels and paraded around with a woman on each arm while chomping on a cigar. He bribed government officials and ignored law enforcement. He brought gunshots and arson to town. Ultimately, Bonavena and Conforte lived wild lives, and the collision of those lives could end only in disaster.

Bonavena the fighter, whose accomplishments typically draw little attention, competed in a fantastically deep heavyweight division. On September 21, 1966, at Madison Square Garden, against unbeaten future heavyweight champion Joe Frazier, Bonavena almost made it. The Argentine already knew defeat – he'd lost twice in his first few years as a professional – and he initially fought Frazier like a desperate man with nothing to lose. He was one knockdown away from changing boxing history.

But Bonavena's response to what looked like an inevitable victory over Frazier represented what he would do in both his career and life – he got in his own way, stifled himself and retreated. Then he lost.

The following is an excerpt from *Shot at a Brothel: The Spectacular Demise of Oscar "Ringo" Bonavena*:

n returning to the United States, Oscar Bonavena predictably went back to Grossinger's to train as Frazier trained at the Concord Hotel Resort, also in the Catskills. Bonavena continued to burn through everyone's money except his own as he kept valuable cars, property, and businesses in Buenos Aires. Despite investing wisely in Argentina, he still badgered Goldberg and associates for cash regularly.

Even so, it wasn't enough; during one of his prefight workouts at Grossinger's, Oscar told reporters he wanted to be backed by a group of business people and investors, like Frazier had with Cloverlay, Inc. Instead, Oscar's syndicate was a collection of random stiffs whose investments were divided and sold off already.

Bonavena even traded Charley Goldman for trainer Sid Martin, an experienced East Coast trainer found often at Stillman's Gym.

"Fighters need lots of lawyers now," Bonavena said. "Every champion in every division had a lawyer doing business for him. That seems to be the way to win a title. A couple of bankers won't hurt either."

The interview was either translated or completely spoken on his behalf. Bonavena's English just wasn't that good. But the point was there: Bonavena believed a title could be bought, and his inability to find a clear path to one meant the wrong people worked his corner. To him a championship wasn't something a fighter must work to earn.

As with show business, success in boxing can be as much about contacts and personal favors as merit, so to some degree Bonavena had a point. But a fighter can't rely on greased palms. When pens are put down and the suits all line up ringside, a fighter must still fight.

Bonavena eased himself into the business discussion, demanding that [Teddy] Brenner also give up 100 percent of Argentine film rights to the Frazier clash. Brenner almost screwed up the entire deal when he accidentally signed the rights away to a different company and Bonavena refused to fight. Not surprisingly, the show proceeded only when the Garden came up with some extra money.

In the last few days leading to the fight, the NYSAC requested Bonavena cut his hair, to the Argentine's dismay. "The commission gets me angry," Bonavena told an Associated Press reporter. "They want me to cut my hair. I tell them no. I am like Samson. If I cut my hair, I will lose my strength."

The NYSAC didn't press the issue, and Bonavena kept his mop.

Most pundits suggested the Frazier-Bonavena meeting was simply a litmus test for Frazier, reasoning that Bonavena could take a good punch, wouldn't be difficult to hit, and wasn't a big puncher himself. But Yank Durham and the press either misjudged Ringo's punching power or didn't realize Joe's constant forward momentum and leaping would recklessly lead him into something wild. Or both.

A surprising crowd of over nine thousand showed up to the Garden on an incredibly rainy Wednesday night, including enough Bonavena fans to cut through the usual din with chanting. Bonavena appeared almost rattled by Frazier's brute strength as Frazier plowed forward in the opening round. Ringo was unaccustomed to seeing a guy his size tearing at him the way Frazier did, mouthpiece exposed through a sawtooth grin.

In round two, Bonavena swung back with fervor and Frazier pursued, appearing steady in the face of Bonavena's shots. Then, just over one minute into the round, Bonavena inched backward out of a clinch and stared straight through Frazier, who foolishly threw a lazy jab while looking for a right hand. Bonavena saw it and dodged the punch by pulling his upper body back, then countered with a jab and right hand that dropped Frazier onto his back.

Several well-dressed men ringside threw up their arms as if to urge Frazier off the canvas. The Olympic gold medalist

rose to his feet at the count of four on unsteady legs and staggered to the ropes. When the action resumed, Bonavena cuffed Frazier with left hooks as Frazier reached out to hold on. One hook caught Frazier's ear, knocking him backwards and straight down to the mat, although not as violently this time. When Frazier bounced up at the count of two, about half of the round remained.

This was Bonavena's chance. He had an unbeaten commodity teetering in front of him, ready to be knocked down a third time, which would have meant an automatic technical-knockout win. Bonavena barged in and landed a right hand before falling into Frazier's clinch. Like a novice, he proceeded to stifle his punches, killing his chances by pushing forward recklessly. He should have composed himself and found the right distance, or gone to the body to bring Frazier's gloves down if he couldn't help but fight inside. But he didn't, and even worse he rocked out of a clinch with a bad cut over his left eye.

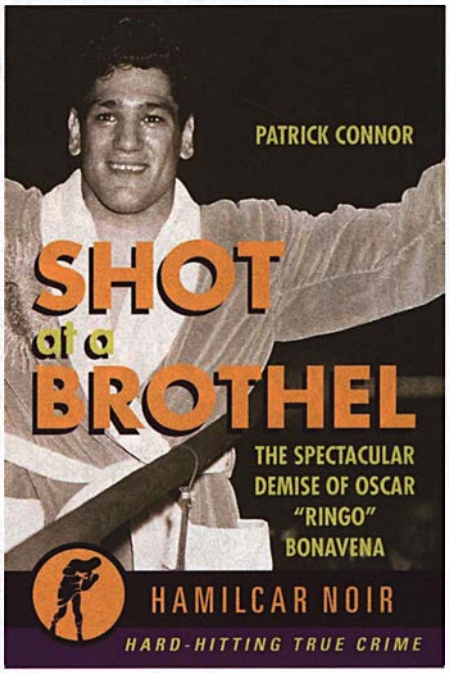
With thirty seconds remaining, Frazier found his composure and smiled his way to the bell. It was part relief, part taunting, as if to say, "You just lost your chance, pal." Still, Cloverlay, Inc. was nervous after that disastrous round.

Yank Durham later told Sports Illustrated, "[Frazier] wasn't moving like he should—side to side, slipping punches, ducking under, coming in and punching at the same time."

Round three unfolded almost as if the previous round never existed, because Frazier began doing those exact things. Bonavena mostly retreated, about half of his offense consisting of pushing off as Frazier got him to the ropes and banged away.

Frazier softened Bonavena up with body shots and caught him with several hard hooks to the head while Bonavena continued to retreat between failed attempts at landing another blockbuster right hand. When Bonavena fell into clinches—which was often—he draped himself over Frazier, who continually freed his gloves and schooled the Argentine on the basics of fighting at close range.

Bonavena certainly tried to get right hands to land, but telegraphed punches don't typically connect. Pushed back too often and unable to plant his feet and throw a left hook with conviction, Bonavena lost several rounds and allowed Frazier to make up the points he'd lost for getting knocked down.



In the middle of round six, Frazier's output dropped and he began tiring, bringing the fight down to street level, which suited Bonavena just fine. But Frazier's right hands, which weren't even his best punches, were still more effective than Bonavena.

Frazier continued working Bonavena's hips in the seventh, drawing a warning from the referee and visible complaints from Bonavena, whose cut bled freely the entire time. In the eighth, Bonavena backed to the ropes continually and braced for punches by doubling over, but they landed hard anyway.

Madison Square Garden's play-by-play man, the venerable Don Dunphy, spoke too kindly of Bonavena on the televised broadcast. Apart from two rounds, he had been mostly outfought and at times beaten up.

In round ten, Bonavena took a long, deep breath and dug in to exchange with Frazier, finding success once more by bouncing around and timing Frazier on his way in. The Madison Square Garden crowd appreciated a stirring, albeit sloppy, end to the bout. When the final bell rang, Frazier smiled and grabbed Bonavena around the neck as the Argentine huffed his way around the ring exhausted.

The split-decision win for Frazier was fair. In close rounds Frazier's body punching filled gaps in the action while Bonavena pushed off, looking for space and perhaps time. Frazier also set the pace as the aggressor all evening. The crowd still didn't like the result, booing it even as Dunphy interviewed Frazier for television.

NYSAC doctor Harry Kleiman told Jim McCulley of the New York Daily News that Bonavena suffered various contusions on his hip from being hit. Sid Martin complained loudly enough to referee Mark Conn about low blows that a commissioner ringside ordered Martin to report to NYSAC offices for a hearing. A disappointed Bonavena and his team talked about protesting the decision and the fight's officiating before heading to the hospital. Yet again he'd been beaten in front of an American audience, which meant it was time to buoy himself in Buenos Aires.

There was something Bonavena could take home with him, though: He dulled Frazier's shine by taking him the distance for the first time. Robert Lipsyte of The New York Times wrote from ringside, "Bonavena, who has been called a bum and an animal, never quit." Technically correct, Lipsyte might not have known Bonavena smashed his fist through a dressing room door at the Garden after the fight.

Shot at a Brothel: The Spectacular Demise of Oscar "Ringo" Bonavena is available at Amazon.com or Hamilcar Publications at hamilcarpubs.com/brothel.

Frazier blasts Ringo with an uppercut in their 1968 rematch.

By **Ron Lipton**

CHARLES "SONNY" LISTON

AGE: 31*

HEIGHT: 6-foot-1½

WEIGHT: 215½ pounds

REACH: 84 inches

FIST: 15 inches

RECORD: 35-1, 25 KOs

* AGE AND RECORD AFTER THE 2ND PATTERSON FIGHT

V.S.

GEORGE FOREMAN

AGE: 25*

HEIGHT: 6-foot-3

WEIGHT: 224¾ pounds

REACH: 78½ inches

FIST: 12½

RECORD: 40-0, 37 KOs

* AGE AND RECORD AFTER THE KEN NORTON FIGHT

Veteran referee and historian Ron Lipton, a former amateur boxer who was inducted into the New York and New Jersey boxing halls of fame, is proud to present the fourth instalment of his well-received mythical matchup series for The Ring.

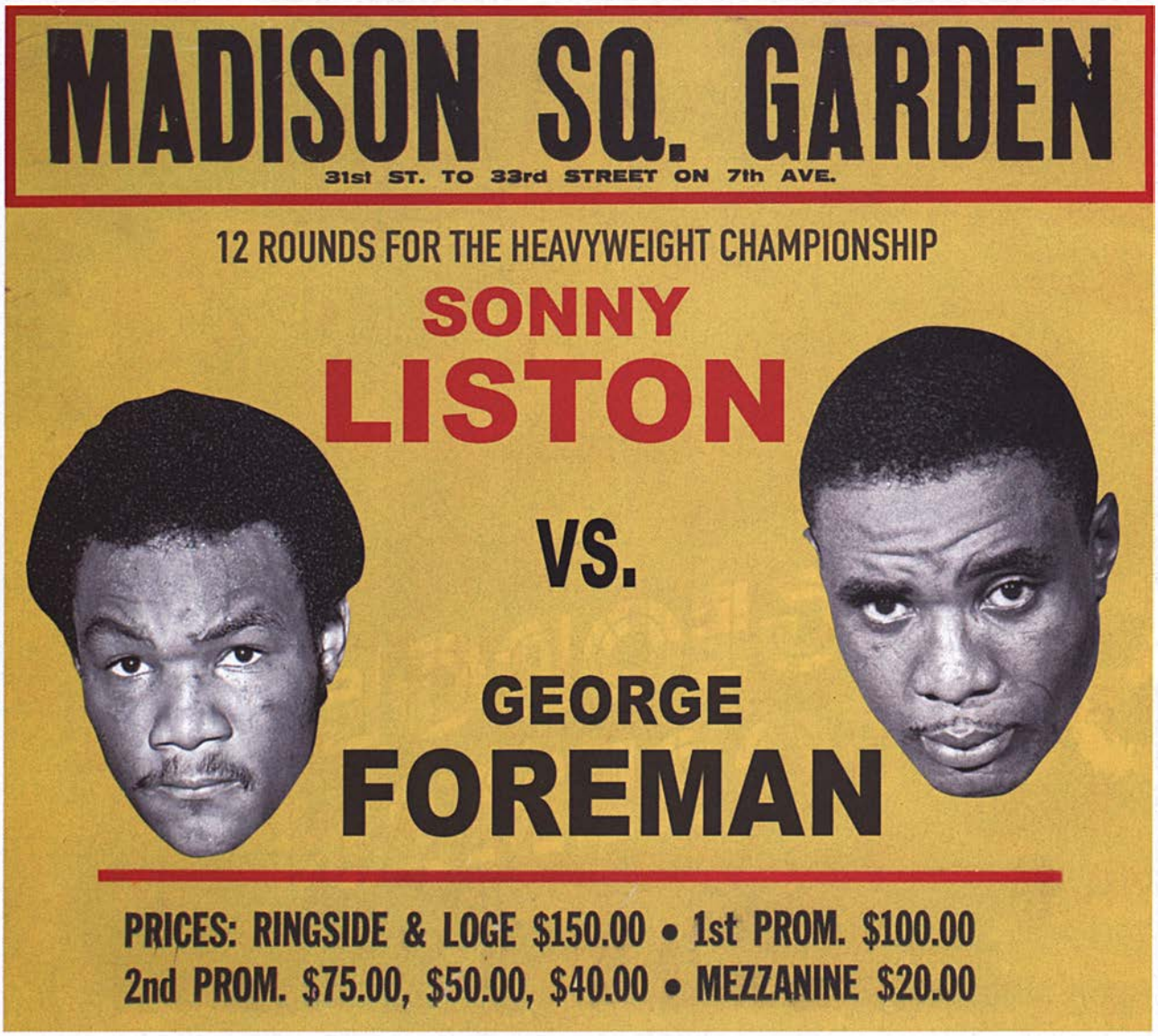
"This mythical matchup pits two of the hardest-punching heavyweight champions in boxing history against one another," said Lipton. "The mental and physical package of both Liston and Foreman was stronger, meaner, and more confident than any other heavyweight of their eras, which briefly overlapped in the late 1960s.

"Keep in mind that a mythical matchup is just that, 'mythical.' It is pure imagination for fun and your enjoyment with a dash of poetic license to flavor the main course."

While on top of their game, Sonny Liston and George Foreman dispatched their awesome power with ruthless abandon. Both men radiated menacing brute force with just a look.

As they stood in their corners, awaiting the opening bell, fans knew they would soon witness mayhem. From the onset of their bouts, Liston and Foreman were on the hunt to hurt and destroy their opposition. They usually devoured their prey like apex predators, even when matched against world-class opposition, although a few experienced and wily veterans were able to make it to the final bell.

Early in his pro development, Liston learned some of the nuances to his brutal trade during three bouts with Marty Marshall, two of which went the distance. Marshall,



a seasoned fringe contender who also fought at light heavyweight, upset the fearsome prospect in their first meeting in 1954 (Liston's eighth pro bout) but was stopped in their rematch and outpointed over 10 rounds in their 1956 rubbermatch. As an emerging contender, Liston was taken the 10-round distance by Bert Whitehurst in 1958 and the 12-round distance by fellow contender Eddie Machen in 1960.

George Foreman was taken the 10-round distance against both Levi Forte and the undersized but vastly more experienced Gregorio Peralta in 1969 and 1970, not long after his gold-medal winning showing at the 1968 Olympic Games.

Once they reached their primes, Liston and Foreman crushed the champions and top contenders of their eras. Liston destroyed Cleveland Williams (twice), Nino Valdez, Zora Folley, Mike DeJohn and Floyd Patterson (twice in one round). Foreman did the same to Boone Kirkman, George Chuvalo, Joe Frazier and Ken Norton.

I knew Liston very well through our close friend Rubin Carter. I witnessed them spar together in Philadelphia. Sonny treated me well and we had some good laughs together with Rubin.

I've seen every Liston fight available on film and I watched all of his fights that were broadcast live on network TV and closed circuit.

I also attended many of Foreman's fights in person. I enjoyed his company during his years as color commentator for HBO Sports. I spent some wonderful moments with George before and after several of the big fights I refereed at Madison Square Garden.

THE MAKING OF THE FIGHT: THE UNIFIED HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP OF THE WORLD

Liston was still seething and hurt by the absence of any crowd to greet him in his adopted hometown of Philadelphia following his one-round stoppage of Patterson to win the WBA and WBC titles.

He was tired of being the bad guy. He never wanted that

label. Liston was a hard man with a dark past, but he felt like he'd transcended all that when he saw that children were delighted to be with him and take photos on the champ's lap. Being loved, wanted, and respected had a glowing effect on him and smoothed out his inner demons.

His wife, Geraldine, knew what he went through as a child, how he was beaten unmercifully by his father, and what he had to do in order to make a living once the mob got their clutches into him. She, and others, saw him differently and felt he had a lot of good in him if given the chance.

Among those who believed in Sonny was Father Edward P. Murphy of the St. Ignatius Loyola Church in Denver, Colorado. It was another man of the cloth, Father Alois Stevens, who encouraged Liston to take up boxing while he was incarcerated in the Missouri State Penitentiary.

When his managers came to him with the offer of the George Foreman fight, Liston wasn't surprised. He knew the showdown with the other heavyweight champ was coming sooner or later. Liston had let Foreman spar with him when Doc Broadus brought George to Dick Sadler's gym in Oakland, California, and once more before one of Sonny's fights.

Liston knew the kid was strong as an ox, and they got along OK until Foreman embarrassed him by handing him a horoscope book to read. Sonny growled at him to get it out of his face and brushed him off.

George was later told that Sonny could not read, and he was truly sorry about the mistake he had made. It was forgotten and Sonny kept teaching him things in the ring.

Foreman revered and respected Liston, and always said that he patterned his own style after Liston's, including the hard looks and intimidation.

Now, after watching Foreman collect heavyweight titles as he blasted his way through the division, Sonny knew their paths would cross.

He believed Foreman was as dangerous as Cleveland Williams and hit harder than Mike DeJohn, but fear and doubt were not part of Liston's psyche. He knew he could handle his former gym apprentice no matter how much George had improved. And despite their friendship, Liston was never so fond of anyone that he would take it easy on them in a fight. The Missouri State penal system had burned pity out of him long ago.

In fact, there was a bit of a grudge in this matchup. It bothered Liston that Foreman was a glorified Olympic champion and a beloved American while he was loathed as an ex-convict.

Liston was generally sour on the boxing business because the mob guys still had their hooks into him. He wanted to break away from Joseph "Pep" Barone, Frankie Carbo, Blinkie Palermo and all they represented forever, but knew what they were capable of, and being a hard-punching heavyweight wouldn't mean two straws in a wind storm to them. He was money on the hoof to them and nothing more.

Mob ties or not, Madison Square Garden wanted the fight. Sonny's manager, Jack Nilon, told him it was a done deal and to get ready. Sonny's trainer, Willie Reddish, would be in his corner with assistant Milt Bailey. He was told to keep Joe Polino as his cut man.

When George's trainer-manager, Dick Sadler, came to him with the fight, Foreman agreed to it, as it was all business, but inside he felt something he had never experienced when accepting an opponent. Liston remained the only fighter who made him back up in the ring. His jab was like running into a telephone pole, and he had underrated boxing skills that made him hard to hit. George also admired and respected Sonny. The mentor-to-pupil relationship he once had with Sonny was a fond memory, but one that had to be put aside for this fight.

Liston trained at the Pines Resort in Fallsburg, New York. Foreman trained in Houston.

Their respective camps were spartan. Both trained for an all-out shootout if it came down to throwing bricks to survive.

The Garden sold out the first day, and even hardcore fans had butterlfies thinking about what this fight would portend. Oddsmakers set Liston as the slightest favorite at 6-to-5 in the pick-'em dream bout.

Liston was more taciturn than usual and brusque with reporters who tried to get him to commit to a prediction. When pushed too far one day, he snapped back, "Just get a ref that knows how to count to 10."

One reporter asked Liston: "You guys used to spar, but what about a real fight, Sonny?" Liston replied: "Haven't I been having real fights?" Everyone laughed, but Sonny was serious.

Liston refused to say anything bad about George and Foreman did the same.

The reports from all the boxing writers were practically the same. Both Liston and Foreman were in great shape, and witnessing their sparring and heavy bag work was like watching a freight train slam into a brick wall.

The night of the fight, both men were in their dressing rooms, taped and warming up.

Geraldine was off to one side of her husband's dressing room. The two priests that Liston cared very much for had his permission to be in the room with him for a prayer before the fight.

However, prior to his walkout, three of the old crew who had pulled the mob strings with Sonny early on entered the dressing room along with a big man wearing a cowboy hat and boots that did not go with the tailored suits of the others.

One of the mob guys shot a look at Reddish, himself a former heavyweight, and waved him to get out of the way. The two priests looked on as if Satan himself had walked into the room.

Geraldine had a frightened look on her face and had seen this kind of thing before.

Liston looked twice as big as all of them in his white terry cloth robe with a towel under the hood as they whispered to him. No one but Liston could hear them, but everyone

CHARLES "SONNY" LISTON VS. GEORGE FOREMAN

in the room could feel that something sinister was going down.

"Every good thing has an end, Sonny. This kid is going places and America loves this guy. Olympic gold, the whole thing. The bets are in and you are covered. Don't give it all you have, make it look good and pick a time and that's that. You've been told."

Liston said nothing at first, but then he mumbled, "I'm tired of being the bad guy."

"What the fuck is that supposed to mean?"

Before Sonny could answer and possibly make matters worse, the priests quickly walked over and intervened. "Excuse me, it's time to say a prayer with Charles."

The men gave Liston one hard glance and then collectively walked out of the dressing room.

The priests' motioned for Geraldine to come over and join them in prayer.

Father Murphy had a different prayer in mind until he saw what had just happened.

He wisely knew what he had to ask of God now.

They held hands: "Dear Father in Heaven, in Jesus' name we ask you to hear our prayer. You are a prayer-answering God, and we ask that you forgive us for our sins and bless Charles Liston tonight by standing by him and inside him. Forgive him for his past sins and help him to be the good man and great champion he worked so hard to become.

"Let no one lead him down the path of evil men. Stand with him tonight and help him to do his honest best and be an example of a great champion to all the children who look up to him.

"Protect both fighters in the ring and let people remember Charles as a good, decent, God-fearing man who always did his best to take the right path, as he will tonight. Amen."

Liston was touched deeply.

As tears stream down his wife's face, the menacing scowl vanishes from Liston's face and is replaced with a fierce determination more powerful than any rage or emotion he has ever felt. He feels a weight lifted from his broad shoulders and knows what he must do.

Reddish drapes a white and gold satin robe with the blazing emblem of the shining sun over the terry cloth. They walk out of the dressing room into the arena to confront fate.

In Foreman's dressing room, Dick Sadler, Archie Moore and former featherweight champ Sandy Saddler talk to the undefeated champion.

Foreman has a good sweat going and is brimming with confidence. Moore tells him, "Haste makes waste. Use your jab at the right time and remember how damn long his arms are. He's like Jimmy Bivins: You think you are out of range and he tags you.

"He can box; he slips shots. When he closes the gap, fire a hard jab-right uppercut-left hook. Catch him on the duck with the right hand and hit him with that damn hook out of nowhere you hit Chuvalo with. Get him going and rain on him. Don't chase him. Break him up and wear him down."

Dick Sadler interrupts: "OK, OK, enough. Just fight your fight. You ain't that kid he banged around way back when. Now he gets banged around. You hit harder and now you're the one who is stronger, got it?"

Foreman frowns while summoning up his fire from within and readily nods in agreement.

The sold-out crowd has seen both men warming up in their dressing rooms on the big screen, and the fans are wild with anticipation now that the prelims are over.

Sam Cooke's "A Change Is Gonna Come" blares as Liston, surrounded by his corner men, enters the arena.

His carriage is straight up, head held high under the hooded robe. He looks directly toward the ring. The whole package screams nitroglycerin on ice. Liston climbs through the ropes with the aura of the most menacing heavyweight in history.

Under the bright ring lights, he turns to face the crowd and sees his beloved priests at ringside. But as his lion's gaze sweeps around ringside, he also sees the mob guys looking up at him. Only after seeing his wife does he start to loosen up his powerful shoulders, throwing short punches while the crowd is delirious with excitement.

Now Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the U.S.A" echoes throughout the fabled arena.

Here comes Big George in his red, white and blue satin robe. He looks big as a mountain and is in-between Archie Moore and Dick Sadler, with Sandy Sadler and the great Al Gavin, his cut man, trailing behind.

Foreman looks confident, powerful and ready. Archie sits on the ropes and Big George climbs in to do battle.

It is down to Michael Buffer now.

"Ladies and gentleman, this is the main event of the evening, the fight we have all been waiting for: 12 rounds of boxing for the undisputed heavyweight championship of the world! It's brought to you by Madison Square Garden boxing, HBO Sports and sanctioned by the New York State Athletic Commission, Executive Director Kim Sumbler and Director of Boxing Matt Delaglio.

"The three judges scoring from ringside, assigned by the New York State Athletic Commission, are Harold Lederman, John McKaie and Steve Weisfeld.

"Inside the ring, the man in charge of the action when the bell rings is Shada Murdaugh.

"Now the officials are ready, the fighters in the ring are ready. And for the thousands in attendance and the millions watching around the world: Are you ready!?

"Ladies and gentlemen, LET'S GET READY TO RUMBLE!"

Buffer's famous introduction thunders throughout the Garden. Around the world, boxing fans roar in anticipation.

"Introducing first, out of the blue corner, wearing the black trunks trimmed in white weighing in at 215½ pounds with a record of 35 wins, one loss with 25 knockouts, hailing from Denver, Colorado, the WBC, WBA heavyweight champion of the world, CHARLES "SONNY" LISTON!"

The Garden crowd explodes in applause for Liston and his fistic accomplishments.

"And in the red corner, wearing the red, white and blue trunks, weighing in at 224¾ pounds with a record of 40 wins, no losses with 37 knockouts, hailing from Houston, Texas, the Olympic gold medal winner and the reigning IBF, WBO and Ring Magazine world heavyweight champion, 'BIG' GEORGE FOREMAN!"

The crowd's response is deafening.

HBO's ringside commentators are talking about the referee, who is 6-foot-7, and how he should be able to control the fighters.

The crowd simmers to a murmur as Murdaugh calls Liston and his chief second, Reddish, to ring center along with Foreman and Sadler.

Foreman is taller by 1½ inches and outweighs Liston by a little over nine pounds, but Liston looks bigger and more powerful through the shoulders.

"I've given you the rules of the New York State Athletic Commission," Murdaugh tells them. "Protect yourself at all times, obey my commands at all times. Any questions? OK, touch gloves and let's get to work."

Sonny looks right through George. Foreman stares back at him and then breaks away as if he did not like what he saw. This is a different Sonny Liston tonight.

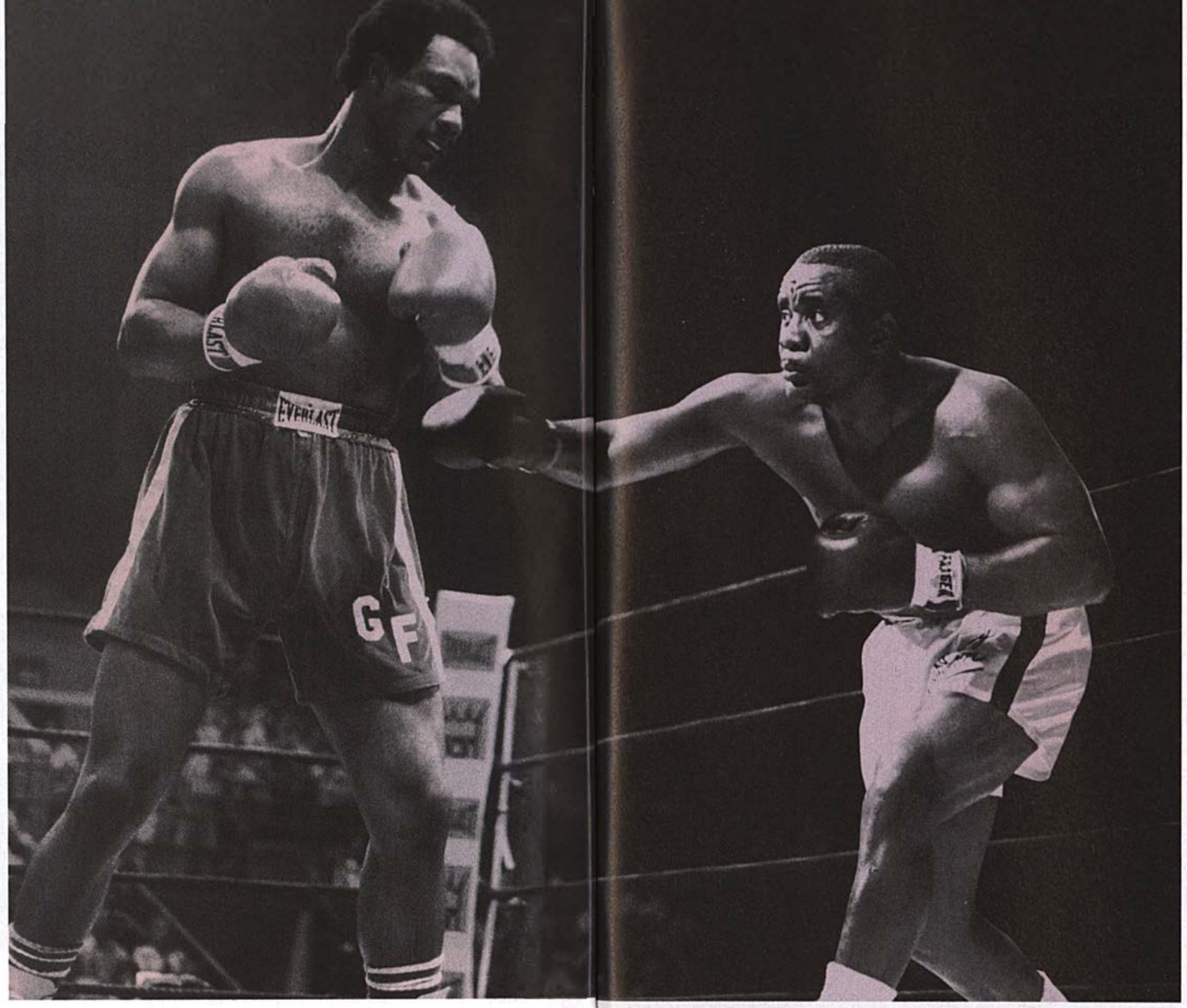
ROUND 1:

Liston comes in toward Foreman, who has his hands held high.

Liston snaps long jabs that Foreman blocks with his high gloves. The jabs are so hard they violently jam Foreman's own gloves into his face.

Foreman sets himself and throws stiff rights and left hooks that Liston ducks and weaves under as he works his way in close enough to start blasting to George's body. Liston's aim is to back Foreman into the ropes.

Foreman, already on his back foot, keeps throwing hard hooks and chopping rights out of self defense. He momentarily stands his ground, locking his powerful legs, and punches back furiously with uppercuts and left hooks to get Liston off of him, but he's still backed to the ropes.



Foreman grabs Liston's arms to move him sideways but cannot shift the veteran. Liston knocks Foreman's gloves away and goes to the head and body with short hard punches.

They slug it out along the ropes and the Garden crowd is on their feet screaming and cheering for the wildfire shootout. Foreman, back still to the ropes, doesn't give an inch and blazes back at Liston.

Foreman finally pushes Liston back with two open gloves, and with the room the illegal move gives him, he bombs at Liston with the same uppercut that floored Frazier in Jamaica. The crowd roars in anticipation, but Liston catches the punch with an open right glove under his chin and counters with a whistling left hook that is so fast it catches Foreman by surprise but does not land flush.

The punch grazes Foreman's chin and rocks him back on his heels.

Murdaugh gestures and shouts to Foreman, "NO PUSHING WITH OPEN GLOVES! Punch him off; don't push!"

The bell rings.

10-9 Liston

ROUND 2:

Liston bounds right in at Foreman, who is moving laterally now after Sadler screamed at him in the corner not to move straight back to the ropes. The veteran manager implored Foreman to take command and get off first.

George is jabbing hard and landing high on Liston's head. One hard jab, then another. Soon, Liston sports swelling above his left eye as Foreman gains confidence. The young champ moves in to throw his hardest punches and Liston is all too glad to exchange with him in the middle of the ring.

The sound of Foreman's punches are chilling as he lands murderous hooks to the side of Liston's body. Every impact is a veritable explosion of leather.

Foreman is swinging wildly to get things over with, following hooks with chopping rights. But Liston skillfully weaves under the head shots and fires back. Now both men are landing heavy shots.

A tremendous left hook lands on the side of Liston's jaw and the crowd stands, screaming. The punch is so hard it moves Liston's entire body, but he takes it, and before Foreman can bring the hook back, Liston retaliates with a pulverizing short right hand between George's gloves. Foreman wobbles into a tremendous Liston left hook that lands flush on his jaw.

George's gloves drop to his waist as Liston rolls his shoulders and lands short, jolting punches. Foreman sags one knee to the canvas. Liston runs to a neutral corner.

The alternate ringside referee shouts the count up to Murdaugh, who picks it up at "four" and is shouting it to Foreman with a finger count: "five, six!" Foreman is up. "Seven, eight! Take a step forward, to the side." Foreman obeys and is ready to fight back. "You OK?" Foreman nods and says, "Yeah."

The bell rings and both fighters return to their corners.

10-8 Liston

BETWEEN ROUNDS:

The crowd is a delirious mass of excitement at the spectacle of heavyweight power and courage that has exceeded their wildest expectations.

Liston looks down at ringside while Reddish works on his left eye to take the swelling down.

He sees the suits and the cowboy looking up at him with murder in their eyes. He ignores them and looks at the priests, who are looking back up at him. Sonny sees the love and concern for him in their eyes – the same look is in his wife's eyes at ringside.

ROUND 3:

Foreman leaves his corner with grim determination. This time he goes for broke, using all his strength to force Liston off-balance and into the ropes. He has Liston pinned there, as he had Frazier and Norton. Foreman's shotgun jab sets Liston up for a tremendous right uppercut and left hook that land flush.

Liston is visibly shaken, and once again the crowd stands as one. Foreman bombs Liston with everything in his arsenal as the crowd senses a stoppage. But Liston does not fold. He does not go down, but he is hurt and not punching back.

The referee looks closely at Liston as he contemplates intervening. However, while Liston's eye is close to swollen shut and his nose pours blood, Foreman is clearly getting tired from his relentless attack. Liston is taking a pounding but weathering the storm. Foreman looks spent as the bell rings.

10-9, maybe 10-8 Foreman.

BETWEEN ROUNDS:

Liston looks down at the priests and allows himself a small smile at them.

He's endured a lot worse than the beating Foreman had just put on him, from his father's abuse to the brutal street fights and the horrors of prison to his previous ring battles against the best of the division. Sonny's hard life had steeled his soul. Without a mob puppet master pulling his strings, he is a force unto himself.

ROUND 4:

Liston and Foreman meet in the center of the ring like two Kodiak bears ready to fight to the death.

Foreman has instructions to finish Sonny off while he is still hurt, but an explosive left hook beats him to the punch.

Liston follows up with both hands, driving George back to the ropes again, where he chops away at the Olympic gold medalist the way he did during his two savage encounters with Cleveland Williams.

Foreman's right cheekbone immediately swells from the impact of that big left hook, but he fires back and cuts Liston's other eye. Liston steps in fast, putting his massive shoulders, legs and back into hard, fast punches that drive deep into the younger man's body. Foreman doubles over in agony, protecting his damaged right rib cage.

He's fighting for survival now and retaliates with fierce uppercuts that bloody Liston's nose again, but a series of short, jarring punches to the head force Foreman to slowly collapse to the canvas.

The bell rings and George makes it up at Murdaugh's count of "four."

Liston stands in the neural corner watching it all. Blood continues to flow from his nose down his chest and onto the canvas. Both of his eyes are cut and almost closed.

Foreman survives the round, but Dr. Nitin Sethi visits both corners, and before the bell rings to start Round 5, he orders the referee to stop the fight after examining the damage to Liston's face and the disoriented condition of Foreman, who is having trouble taking a breath.

Michael Buffer takes the mic: "Ladies and gentleman, on the advice of the chief ringside physician, Dr. Nitin Sethi, both fighters are not allowed to continue due to injuries, and this bout is declared a technical draw at the start of the fifth round."

Liston and Foreman struggle to their feet and pull away from their corners to find each other in the middle of the ring. "I always thank God that I met you and you helped me," Foreman tells Liston. "I will always pray for you. Thank you for everything you ever taught me."

Liston hugs him. "Promise me you will be a better person than I ever was and a great champion. Pray for me."

Foreman looks at Sonny and wonders why he said that. "I will, my big brother, always."

As Sonny walks down the steps to the dressing room, he sees the mob guys glaring at him.

The priests hug him and tell him they are proud.

Geraldine looks into his eyes and says, "Charles, I'm not stupid. I'm worried for you now."

Liston's arm is being tugged at by the doctor to go back to the dressing room for medical attention, but before he goes, he says to his wife, "Don't worry, baby. What can they do to me?" RING

Regina Halmich is as popular and successful in retirement as she was as Germany's first superstar female boxer during the 1990s and 2000s. She only lost once in 56 pro bouts (due to a cut suffered in her lone U.S. appearance vs. Yvonne Trevino in 1995).

THE O.G.

FIGHT FANS IN THE U.S. MIGHT NOT KNOW THE NAME, BUT GERMANY'S **REGINA HALMICH** WAS A SUPERSTAR CARVING OUT A HALL OF FAME-WORTHY CAREER WHEN FEMALE FIGHTERS GOT LITTLE NOTICE IN OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD

By **Thomas Gerbasi**

Before Katie Taylor and Claressa Shields, there was Regina Halmich.

That's not news in Europe, particularly in Germany, but for many casual boxing observers in the United States and other parts of the globe, it may be hard to understand how someone who so captured the imagination of fight fans – and actually over-delivered – could have remained unknown on the other side of the Atlantic.

Numbers don't lie, though.

56 fights. 54 wins with one loss and one draw. World titles in three weight classes (108, 112, 115). But here's the best one: a record of 44-1-1 in world title fights. Yes, all but two of her last 48 fights were with a belt on the line. And when she walked away from the sport in 2007 after a majority decision win over Hagar Finer in defense of her WIBF flyweight title*, she did so on a 47-fight unbeaten streak.

She was just 31 years old. But as she puts it, there was nothing left to prove.

"In my heart, I always remain a boxer," said Halmich through a translator. "I follow the scene every day and am still in contact with the professionals and my ex-colleagues. But I never thought of a comeback. I've achieved everything."

Nearly 14 years after that last victory, you have to believe that she's moved on, unlike so many of her peers, both male and female, even though she looks like she can lace up the gloves again and go on another run. That's OK, though, as retirement hasn't exactly been retirement for Halmich, just a step away from being an active competitor in the ring.

"I can say that I arrived after my career [in boxing]," she said. "I am a self-employed entrepreneur and I give motivational lectures at companies. I am an advertising face at some companies. I continue to give training and comment on boxing matches or moderate events. Life after sport is varied and I am still hardworking. Just going on vacation isn't my thing."

It never has been, even when she ruled the boxing world. A pro since the age of 17, the Karlsruhe, Baden-Württemberg, Germany, native was an active fighter to say the least, averaging four fights a year throughout her career. That would be an impressive work rate for a male fighter trying to make it to the top. For a woman at that time in the sport's history, and a champion no less, that's a mark that will likely never be touched.

"At flyweight – and at a weight class above and below me – I boxed everyone who was number one to five in the rankings," said Halmich. "That's how it should be. Back then, there was only one large women's boxing association, so there weren't that many alternatives. Unfortunately, we now have too many associations and the WIBF has not been a leader for a long time. The big associations – WBC, WBA, WBO – are now the measure of all things in women's boxing, but they understand that you can earn good money with us women, too; Katie Taylor is a good example."

Katie Taylor turned pro in 2016 following a pair of Olympic

A focused Halmich walks to the ring for her 2006 flyweight title defense against Viktoria Milo in Duesseldorf.

CHRISTOF KÖEPSEL

Halmich, posing after an Artem Harutyunyan fight in 2019, remains engaged with the boxing scene.

appearances for Ireland that gave her a head start in terms of public recognition. Halmich turned pro in relative obscurity in 1994, but that didn't last long. By 1995, she was a world champion, and the attention surrounding her grew.

"I have always remained authentic and have not let myself be swayed by anyone," she said. "This is very important. As a woman, you not only have to be good at boxing, but you also have to be marketable. I was a tough fighter in the ring but also very womanly outside of the ropes. That certainly helped. And charismatic types are in demand. I must have brought all of that with me, and the audience could identify with me."

From her looks and charisma to walking into her fights to the strains of Rod Stewart's "Da Ya Think I'm Sexy," Halmich had the complete package outside the ring, but none of that would have mattered if she couldn't fight. And Halmich could fight.

At that stage in the development of women's boxing, from 108 to 115 was where the bulk of the talent pool fought. So night in and night out, Halmich got tested, whether it was Yvonne Trevino and Kim Messer, Anissa Zamarron and Jill Matthews, or Daisy Lang and Elena Reid, she fought them all and beat all but one of them – as she was stopped on cuts by Trevino in her lone fight in the United States in 1995.

The fact that she never fought in the States again was disappointing, but it was similar to the situation faced by the Klitschko brothers years later, when fighting at home in Europe was a much more lucrative proposition than traveling abroad.

"It's a shame that I couldn't box more often in the USA," said Halmich. "But that was due to the German TV station. ZDF broadcasted all of my fights live at prime time in Germany and I always had between 5-9 million viewers. This is unique in women's boxing. So there was never much interest in America; the demand in Germany was too great."

Add in the fact that her contract with promoter Universum Box Promotion (the early promoters of Wladimir and Vitali Klitschko) provided top-notch training facilities and a regular paycheck, and it's no surprise that Halmich opted to keep things local.

"That's what you want as a woman in boxing," said Halmich, who has no regrets about how her career went. And why should she? But there is the whole hall of fame question. In 2014, Halmich was in the first class of inductees selected for the International Women's Boxing Hall of Fame (IWBHF), but in the first two classes of women chosen for the International Boxing Hall of Fame in Canastota, Halmich's name was a notable omission among those who follow the ladies' side of the sport.

"I respect every athlete who gets into the [IBHOF]," said Halmich, who will be on the ballot again for the Class of 2022. "But, of course, it is a heartfelt wish that I will also be accepted there. I hope this dream comes true."

Hall of Fame voters, now you know who Regina Halmich is. The next step is righting a wrong and making sure she sits among the greats of the sport she helped pioneer.

**The Women's International Boxing Federation (not the same as the modern-day IBF), founded in 1989, was for many years the dominant organization in women's boxing. It wasn't until after or near the end of Halmich's career that the four main sanctioning bodies of today began awarding titles to women: IBF (2010), WBA (2004), WBC (2005), WBO (2009).*

WORLD BEAT

U.K.

BY GARETH A DAVIES

THE RECOVERY TRUDGES ONWARD

Three Fight Camp events in late July and August followed the success of Eddie Hearn's "backyard boxing" concept on the 15-acre grounds of the Matchroom Sport HQ during the pandemic-affected summer of 2020. This year, the events, broadcast digitally on DAZN in the U.K., produced some interesting contests, though there were a couple of drop-outs due to COVID-19 and injuries.

But boxing is back across The Pond – and busy. The headliner between increasingly popular Conor Benn, son of British hero Nigel, and Adrian Granados to open Fight Camp and Shannon Courtenay's world title defense both fell by the wayside and are to be rescheduled. But there were notable headlines from the three weeks of action, the events having had a marquee feel and crowds of 300-400 in the open air.

Leigh Wood scored a massive upset, dominating Ring-rated featherweight Xu Can by late stoppage, great success for the 30-something who is from Gedling, the same small village in Nottingham as Carl Froch. It was clever matchmaking, putting the big puncher against the volume-puncher from China. Kid Galahad claimed the vacant IBF featherweight world title, taking a second career victory over Jazza Dickens, and Joshua Buatsi advanced his cause at light heavyweight with a late stoppage over Richard Bolotnik. Buatsi is now closing in on a world title challenge by sometime early next year, reckoned Hearn, his promoter. Dmitry Bivol and Joe Smith Jr. may be plausible battles soon, but questions remain as to whether

Eddie Hearn (left, with Adrian Granados) has shown his business agility during the pandemic.

Buatsi has gained enough experience for the likes of Artur Beterbiev. A link-up for Buatsi with Virgil Hunter also looks to be a partnership that could yield improvements for the Londoner. They appear to have had a very fruitful early development period together.

Elsewhere, the week before Fight Camp was underway, at Wembley Arena, London, heavyweight Joe Joyce beat Carlos Takam by sixth-round stoppage in a bustling fight in which Joyce showed what he is: a big bruiser who has a great chin, gets hit but has an engine and a style that breaks down opponents over the rounds. The victory over Takam was solid – there was some dispute over whether it should have been stopped so quickly, but not from my seat – even though Joyce shipped unnecessary shots at times. Whether his style will work for him against the likes of Tyson Fury, Anthony Joshua, Deontay Wilder or even Dillian Whyte remains to be seen.

Sky Sports was set to name its autumn schedule in conjunction with Bob Arum's Top Rank after the departure of Hearn after a long tenure there. Among those contests is Josh Taylor's defense of the undisputed junior welterweight title against Englishman Jack Catterall (mandatory challenger for the WBO belt) in Glasgow late in the year. The Scots will be out in force for Taylor, who has gained heroic stature in his country. He merits a homecoming fight without any question, comparisons being made with the great 1970s Scotsman Ken Buchanan.

The most encouraging news was the continued success of British amateur boxers at the Olympic Games in August. They returned from Tokyo with a record medal haul of six gongs – two gold, two silver, two bronze. Current professionals Anthony Joshua, Taylor, Buatsi and Joyce were all either medalists or extremely successful amateurs from within the Team GB setup in recent years, and given it was a historic medal haul in Japan, the future looks bright for the next group turning over to the paid ranks.

In Sheffield, the English Institute of Sport has become one of the most formidable talent factories in the world of amateur boxing.

The Team GB group for Tokyo included 11 boxers – four women, seven men – and was led by head coach Rob McCracken, the trainer to Joshua and formerly Froch. The institute received almost $20 million in funding from government backing in the last four-year cycle and benefits from a support staff of nutritionists, psychologists, analysts and sports scientists. Joshua still uses the base as part of his training camp for fights and frequently offers advice to the up-and-coming fighters.

The medalists shone in Tokyo. In brief, Galal Yafai won gold at flyweight; Lauren Price stood atop the podium with her gold in the women's middleweight division; light heavyweight Ben Whittaker claimed a silver medal, while Pat McCormack won silver at welterweight. Bronze medals were secured by Karriss Artingstall, women's featherweight, and super heavyweight Frazer Clarke.

The two gold medalists may favor different routes now. Price, who got home to Wales from the Games to a huge reception, had shown nerves of steel in Tokyo, particularly in the final against Li Qian of China, whom the GB boxer dominated. First to greet the 27-year-old was her grandmother Linda, who has raised her from three days old with her late grandfather Derek, who passed away last November. They nurtured and developed the athletic prowess of the sports-mad child, and Olympic gold was the fulfilment of a dream for the family, from world champion kickboxer to international footballer for Wales to becoming one of boxing's elite performers. "I'm glad my dream has come true, but I'm glad I have also given back to them for all the support they have given me over the years," Price told me. "They've always told me to believe in my dreams. Now here I am, an Olympic gold medalist." Price told me it will be a difficult decision as to whether to turn professional or wait until Paris in 2024 to attempt to become a two-time Olympic champion.

Not so Yafai. "I will definitely go pro, a million percent. I've been wanting to for the last few years. But it did pay off to stay amateur. Winning Olympic gold is not the pinnacle of my career – it is just the beginning," the 28-year-old told me. "I want to turn pro before Christmas. I want to show how good I am. I had wanted to turn pro before (he came back from Rio in 2016 without a medal). But it's clear for everyone to see that persistence matters. Sacrifice does pay off, and I have a career ahead of me with the perfect golden launchpad." His older brothers are both professional boxers. Oldest brother Kal held the World Boxing Association 115-pound title from 2016 to 2020, while Gamal is a European junior featherweight champion, with the two having combined professional records of 44 wins from 47 fights. "They always say I'm the best of the three, but I don't know if I'd agree," Galal told me. "But it's a thrill to know I've won Olympic gold like some of my boxing heroes – Oscar De La Hoya, Pernell Whitaker and Muhammad Ali."

Gareth A Davies is the boxing writer for the London Telegraph.

PHILIPPINES

BY RYAN SONGALIA

Boxing has always been the Philippines' strongest Olympic event, but virtually no one expected what occurred in Tokyo. Of the four boxers sent by the country, three of them returned with medals. Nesthy Petecio, the women's featherweight silver medalist, became the first female boxer to win a medal, while men's flyweight Carlo Paalam earned a silver after making it to the final. Eumir Marcial, the men's

middleweight, earned a bronze after stopping his first two opponents to begin the Olympics.

Those three medals represent more than a fifth of the country's 14 total medals ever since first competing at the Olympics as a sovereign nation in 1924. Though the Philippines has now won eight medals in boxing, they hadn't been able to register a medal since 1996, when Mansueto "Onyok" Velasco captured the country's imaginations but settled for silver against Daniel Petrov of Bulgaria.

Many thought Velasco should have won the light flyweight gold medal, and it would be 25 long years before the Philippines got another crack at a boxing gold. Petecio, the reigning world champion, was the aggressor throughout her gold medal match on August 3 with Japan's Sena Irie, who was taller and boxed in a disciplined style. Petecio had her best round in the second, stunning Irie, but faded late in the third in a 5-0 loss.

Instead of waiting another generation for another gold medal match, the Philippines only had to wait a few days, as Paalam was in another final against Great Britain's Galal Yafai. Paalam, who had defeated the defending gold medalist Shakhobidin Zoirov of Uzbekistan and two-time Olympian Mohamed Flissi to get to the final, was knocked down in the opening round by a left hook-right hand combination from the aggressive Yafai and outhustled in the second round, meaning he would have needed a knockout in the third to win the gold.

That KO didn't come, but Paalam never stopped trying. And at age 23, he will still be young enough to be a serious force at the Paris Games in three years.

For Marcial, his run at Tokyo began with thunder, as he dropped Younes Nemouchi of Algeria early and then cut him to force an injury stoppage in the round of 16. He then stormed through the quarterfinals, knocking out fellow Freddie Roach-trainee Arman Darchinyan of Armenia with a single right hook in the first round. In the semifinals, he met Oleksandr Khyzhniak, who had defeated him just two years prior. Khyzhniak, a Ukrainian with a motor that would make Henry Armstrong proud and a chin of granite, absorbed heavy punches and outworked Marcial late to win a 3-2 decision.

For MP Promotions President Sean Gibbons, anything short of a gold medal was a disappointment.

"[Marcial] was a ton better than the Ukrainian, but it's embarrassing," said Gibbons, who handles Marcial's pro career. "Even the Senator (Manny Pacquiao) asked, 'How do you run out of gas after three minutes?' I was bummed about that."

Gibbons says Marcial will be back at the Wild Card Boxing Club shortly and will be looking for his second pro win in October, with hopes to get back in the ring again before the year ends.

Eumir Marcial received middleweight bronze, but there were people who expected more from him.

★★★

Good news for John Riel

Casimero: He defeated a two-time Olympic gold medalist and former world champion. The bad news: His split decision win on August 14 over Guillermo Rigondeaux was a dull affair that did little to boost his marketability stateside.

Casimero, whose brash and offensive personality could qualify him as the Filipino version of Ricardo Mayorga, combined with Rigondeaux to land just 91 punches, the lowest total for a 12-round fight that CompuBox had ever tracked in its 36-year history.

Dignity Health Sports Park may never again be called "The Punch Bowl" after that exhibition, but a win is a win, and it earned the WBO bantamweight titleholder Casimero some bragging rights against fellow Filipino rival Nonito Donaire, who

lost to Rigondeaux in 2013.

Casimero attempted to revisit the canceled unification bout with Donaire in his Showtime post-fight interview, saying the WBC titleholder was next in line in his quest for bantamweight supremacy. Counting down on his fingers, the last one remaining was the middle finger, which he directed toward Ring/IBF/WBA champion Naoya Inoue.

Showtime interviewer Jim Gray described his response as "colorful," but it was nothing compared to the remark Casimero made about Rigondeaux to interviewer Adriana Jimenez, mocking Rigondeaux's "El Chacal" nickname by saying he should be called by a similar-sounding Filipino term referring to self-gratification. He may not know how to make friends, but Casimero is certainly an original.

The Philippines went 2-1 on that card, with former Casimero conqueror Jonas Sultan scoring a seventh-round knockout of Sharone Carter and Raymond Tabugon being stopped after five rounds by Juan Carlos Payano.

The Philippines and Cuba are locked in a mini-rivalry, with Casimero's win over Rigondeaux and Pacquiao's loss to Yordenis Ugas the week after. There have been few bouts between these two distant nations. The last significant win by a Filipino over a Cuban? Onyok Velasco's 14-5 victory against Yosvani Aguilera in the light flyweight round of 16 at the Atlanta Games.

JAPAN

BY YURIKO MIYATA

More than 60 percent of the Japanese public were against the Olympics taking place in their country amid the COVID-19 pandemic, according to polls conducted by several major newspapers. However, the same percentage professed to "enjoy" the Tokyo Games once the 17 days of elite athletic competition was completed.

The performances of Japanese boxers contributed to the public's change of heart, along with the stories of all of the athletes overcoming such a difficult time.

The Olympic boxing tournament, which ran from July 24 to August 8, was one of the major sports to draw national attention, as were baseball, softball and fencing.

There were "firsts" in three categories: the first female boxing delegates, the first female gold medal winner and the first time Japan won three medals.

Female flyweight Tsukimi Namiki captured the bronze medal out of 26 participants. The 5-foot southpaw, who utilized quick offense and bouncy footwork, dominated Catherine Nanziri of Uganda and Graziele Sousa of Brazil in the preliminaries before outpointing the third-seeded Valencia Victoria of Colombia in the quarterfinal to secure a medal. In the semifinal, she was outpointed by Stoyka Krasteva of Bulgaria, who had defeated the USA's Virginia Fuchs and second-seeded Yuan Chang of China and eventually won the gold medal.

As a bronze medalist at the 2018 women's world championship, Namiki knew she was expected to medal in Tokyo. "I am honored with the bronze medal and grateful for all the support, but now it's clear that my goal is to become number one in the world," said the 22-year-old member of the Japan Self-Defense Force (Japanese Armed Forces).

Ryomei Tanaka, the older brother of three-division titleholder Kosei Tanaka, pushed himself through the men's tough flyweight bracket to earn a bronze medal, something he had dedicated himself to achieving since failing to qualify for the Rio de Janeiro Games. The fighting

LUIS ROBAYO-POOL

Tsukimi Namiki took bronze at flyweight and has now set the goal of becoming No. 1 in the world.

high school teacher upset 2016 Olympic silver medalist Yoel Finol of Venezuela by unanimous decision and Hu Jianguan of China (the bronze medalist in Rio) via technical decision in the preliminary rounds. The determined southpaw gave it all he had in the quarterfinal to defeat Yuberjen Martinez of Colombia, a silver medalist at light flyweight at the Rio Games, by a 4-1 split decision. Tanaka's Olympic journey ended in the semifinal when he lost a decision (0-5) to fellow southpaw Carlo Paalam of the Philippines, who had upset the tournament favorite, Shakhobidin Zoirov of Uzbekistan, in the previous round.

Though Tanaka was outpointed by Paalam's superb left counter punches, his never-ending effort in the ring prompted his brother to remark on live TV: "I am proud of him. I admired that style."

In the newly added female featherweight division, Sena Irie won the inaugural Olympic gold medal by defeating her biggest rival, Nesthy Petecio, the 2019 world champion from the Philippines.

A junior at the Nippon College of Physical Education, Irie has been in boxing since she was fascinated by famous boxing manga *Ganbare Genki* in second grade. She would eventually win two national junior titles and, in 2018, earn a world youth bronze medal. In 2019, she earned an eighth place in her first world championship competition. Just before the pandemic hit, she beat Petecio in the semifinal of the Asian and Oceania regional qualification tournament, avenging a 2019 defeat and punching her ticket to the Tokyo Games.

At the center stage of Kokugikan, the major sumo arena in Tokyo, Irie confidently advanced through the tournament. At 5-foot-5, she boxed tall and made the most of her jabs and one-two combinations. She dominated Yamileth Solorzano of El Salvador in the first bout, followed by a close but unanimous decision over the awkward Khouloud Hlimi of Tunisia, who was the tournament's second seed. Irie kept getting through tough fights, besting Maria Nechita of Romania and hard-hitting lefty Karriss Artingstall of the U.K., until she met Petecio again in the Olympic final. In their rubber match, Irie remained composed while dealing with the Filipina's constant holding and picked up points with straight punches. She seemed relieved to win by unanimous decision.

"I thought I would receive a silver medal, and I would have been proud enough," Irie said without knowing exactly how much fame her achievement would bring.

A couple of days later, a legendary retired baseball player was asked about the first Japanese female boxing Olympic gold medalist, and he commented that he did not have any idea why such a young lady would choose to pursue boxing. The comment was met with massive public criticism and heaped more positive attention on Irie, who just wants people to support women's boxing.

Nesthy Petecio (left) and Sena Irie battled for featherweight gold.

By the way, Boxing Magazine, Japan's oldest boxing publication (active since 1956), decided to feature Irie as the cover subject of the latest issue. It's the first time the monthly magazine featured a solo woman on its cover. Doing something unprecedented is the best way to earn true respect.

SOUTH AFRICA

BY DROEKS MALAN

The South African boxing community was saddened by the recent passing of former IBF junior featherweight titleholder Lehlohonolo Ledwaba at the premature age of 49. He was yet another victim of the COVID-19 virus, his death coming as a big shock.

His first name means "luck" in Sepedi, but he had little of that in 2001 when he ran into a then-unknown Manny Pacquiao, who relieved him of his title. Unfortunately, Ledwaba is best known to American fans for that fateful night that kick-started the Filipino's legend, but a closer look at his career will reveal what South Africans have always known: He was an excellent fighter and a fine champion.

Ledwaba had quick hands, an educated jab and more than decent power. No less an authority than Brian Mitchell often referred to him as "the best body puncher in South Africa," and his slashing double hooks to the body were a sight to behold.

I often had the chance to chat with Ledwaba, who had become a trainer in retirement, and he once told me that he was reluctantly persuaded to turn pro in 1990. "I thought I was not ready for it, but my trainers thought otherwise. Eventually they just picked me up from home and told me, 'You are going pro.'" Ledwaba was given the nickname "Hands of Stone." I asked if he was a Roberto Duran fan. "No," he laughed. "An old man gave me that name as an amateur because I was knocking guys out. I did not like it at first. It was only much later that I found out it was Duran's nickname."

His reputation grew fast in the professional ranks, becoming the national 122-pound champion and recording wins over solid international opposition, including former and future beltholders Juan Polo Perez and Cruz Carbajal.

His big chance came in 1999 when he got a shot at the IBF title vacated by another South African legend, the long-reigning Vuyani Bungu. Ledwaba was up against former bantamweight titlist and Junior Jones-conqueror John Michael Johnson. After an uncomfortable start that had him struggling with Johnson's pressure, Ledwaba's wrap-around protector was loosened between rounds. He then settled into his trademark smooth boxing rhythm, winning a hard-fought but clear decision. "That thing was too tight. I couldn't breathe," he explained. "When we adjusted it, I was fine. He was very tough, but I just boxed him. I was so happy to win that title. Everyone wanted to keep it in South Africa." (Besides Bungu, the belt was also previously held by Welcome Ncita.)

Ledwaba went on to make five successful title defenses, stopping four of his opponents. Not content to simply stay at home, three of those contests were on the road. He enjoyed fighting in the U.K. "They support their own fighters, so in the beginning, they will boo you," he recalled. "But then they are also fans of the sport. If you show them that you can fight, in the end, they will cheer for you after the fight."

After a successful title defense against Carlos Contreras on HBO as the main supporting bout to Lennox Lewis-Hasim Rahman I, Ledwaba seemed set to become the next big thing from the continent. That was not to be, but after the devastating defeat to Pacquiao, he had one more great night left in him.

Just over a year later, he faced off against Bungu. In a clash of South African icons, Ledwaba emerged as a clear winner after 12 rounds. "I respected him a lot, because he was champion for so long. Then, after a couple of rounds, I realized that I could handle him. He was no longer that great fighter."

Ledwaba also gave future two-time IBF 130-pound champion Cassius Baloyi all he could handle in two fights, with many thinking Lehlo deserved the decision in their first encounter. After that, Ledwaba faded from the scene, eye trouble forcing his retirement in 2006 with a final record of 36-6-1 with 23 knockouts.

JED JACOBSOHN

Manny Pacquiao broke into the U.S scene with a spectacular sixth-round stoppage of Ledwaba in 2001.

A quiet, humble character outside the ring who often faded into the background, his passion for the sport was unmistakable. When I once asked him what he looked for in a fighter, he surprised me by simply stating, "They must love boxing. It is about the sport for me, whether they become champions or not. Anyone who wants to learn, I will teach them."

He will be sorely missed.

CANADA

BY JAMIE REBNER

Tammara Thibeault made it to the middleweight quarterfinals but came up just short of a medal chance.

The drought for a Canadian Olympic boxing medal continues. Canada sent five boxers to the 2020 Tokyo Games, but all returned empty-handed. The last Canadian boxer to medal was heavyweight David Defiagbon, who captured silver in the 1996 Atlanta Games after losing in the final to Cuban legend Felix Savon.

Flyweight Mandy Bujold had to fight an intense battle just to earn a spot in Tokyo. Bujold was initially ruled ineligible because she was pregnant and postpartum during 2018 and 2019, which was the period that the International Olympic Committee used to determine qualification after the pandemic ruled out the 2020 competitive year. However, after her successful appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport, she was granted permission to compete for Canada in Tokyo. This victory was a monumental achievement because it helped advance gender equality in Olympic boxing.

"I'm pleased that the members of the [CAS] tribunal have seen the importance in not only my case, but in setting a precedent for the future of women's sport," Bujold stated in an interview with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation before the games. "This decision can give hope to young aspiring athletes around the world, knowing that they don't have to decide between an Olympic dream and starting a family."

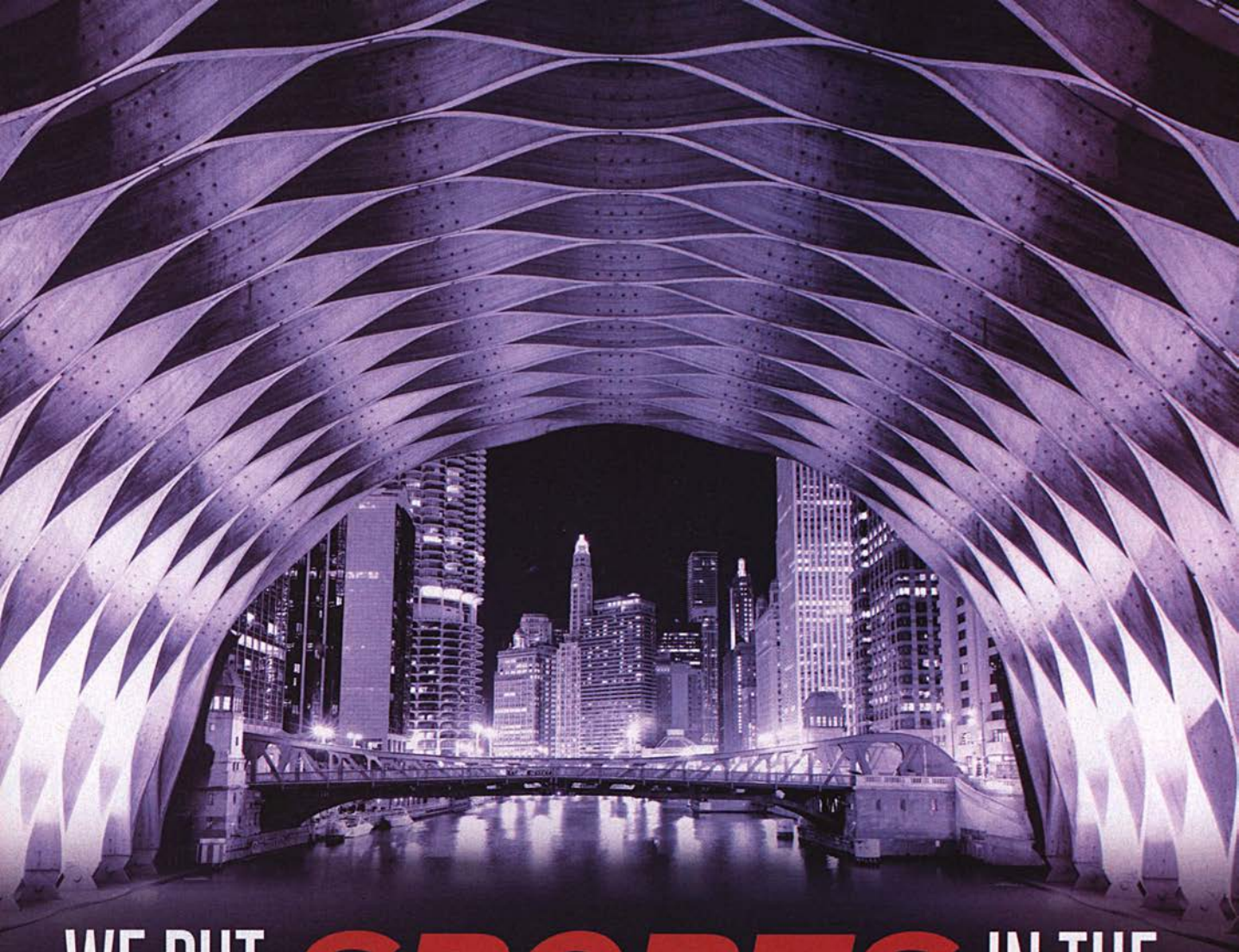
Bujold didn't just want to compete in Tokyo; she wanted to improve on her fifth-place finish at the 2016 Rio Games. However, she struggled in a unanimous points loss to Serbia's Nina Radovanovic in the preliminary round. After the loss, Bujold, 34, announced her retirement from boxing, deciding to turn her focus to life outside the ring. She had a remarkable career as an 11-time national champion and will be remembered fondly as a pioneer for Canadian women's boxing.

Bujold wasn't the only Canadian to lose in the opening round, as Wyatt Sanford lost his preliminary bout to Merven Clair of Mauritius. That result is nothing for the 22-year-old welterweight from Nova Scotia to be ashamed of, as he was competing in his first Olympics while Clair was six years older and had already fought in Rio.

The remaining Canadian hopefuls – featherweight Caroline Veyre, welterweight Myriam Da Silva and middleweight Tammara Thibeault – automatically advanced to the round of 16. While Da Silva lost her bout to Maria Moronta of the Dominican Republic, Veyre and Thibeault won their matchups to advance to the quarterfinals. But that's where Veyre was beaten by Irma Testa of Italy, while Thibeault lost to Nouchka Fontijn of the Netherlands.

Thibeault was a strong medal contender, having won silver at the 2019 Pan-Am Games and bronze at the AIBA World Championships. Although she didn't achieve her desired result, Thibeault is taking a positive spin out of her time in Tokyo: "Even though the result wasn't the one I wanted, I am extremely proud of everything I did, and I am excited for what is to come next."

Just because Team Canada didn't come home with any medals doesn't mean it wasn't a valuable experience. Four out of five boxers were making their Olympic debuts, and they will learn great lessons just by having dealt with the immense stress and pressure that comes with competing on the biggest stage. They also got to compete against the very best athletes in the world, so they now know how much they need to raise their game to fulfill their dream of bringing home a medal in the future. I am proud of all five members of Canada's Olympic delegation, and they should be proud of themselves, too. RING



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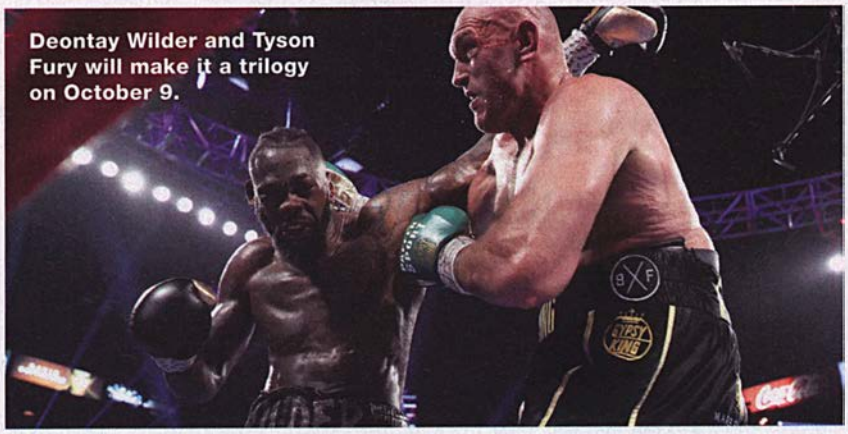
DOUBLE B SPORTS

BUSTED: Evander Holyfield exited the cruiserweight ranks in 1988 as undisputed champion with a perfect 18-0 (14 KOs) record. However, despite those impressive statistics and six subsequent stoppage wins at heavyweight, there were many who felt that new champion and Mike Tyson-conqueror James "Buster" Douglas would be too big and powerful for "The Real Deal." They couldn't have been more wrong. On October 25, 1990, at the Mirage Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas, a 208-pound Holyfield thoroughly dominated a 246-pound Douglas before knocking him out with a single right-hand shot in Round 3. The victory saw Holyfield become the first cruiserweight king to scoop heavyweight honors.

COMING UP


Deontay Wilder and Tyson Fury will make it a trilogy on October 9.

SEPTEMBER

SEPT. 18 – Stephen Fulton vs. Brandon Figueroa, junior featherweights (for Fulton's WBO and Figueroa's WBC titles), Las Vegas (Showtime).
SEPT. 25 – Anthony Joshua vs. Oleksandr Usyk, heavyweights (for Joshua's IBF/WBA/WBO titles), London. (DAZN/Sky Sports Box Office).

OCTOBER

OCT. 9 – Tyson Fury vs. Deontay Wilder, heavyweights (for Fury's Ring/WBC titles), Las Vegas (Fox PPV).
OCT. 9 – Liam Smith vs. Anthony Fowler, junior middleweights, Liverpool, U.K. (DAZN).
OCT. 16 – Juan Francisco Estrada vs. Roman Gonzalez, junior bantamweights (for Estrada's Ring/WBA/WBC titles), U.S. (DAZN).
OCT. 23 – Jamel Herring vs. Shakur Stevenson, junior lightweights (for Herring's WBO title), Atlanta (ESPN/ESPN+).

NOVEMBER

NOV. 6 – Canelo Alvarez vs. Caleb Plant, super middleweights (for Alvarez's Ring/WBA/WBC/WBO and Plant's IBF titles), Las Vegas (Fox PPV).
NOV. 13 – David Benavidez vs. Jose Uzcategui, super middleweights, Phoenix (Showtime).

DECEMBER

DEC. 18 – Josh Taylor vs. Jack Catterall, junior welterweights (for Taylor's Ring/IBF/WBA/WBC/WBO titles), Glasgow, Scotland (ESPN/Sky).

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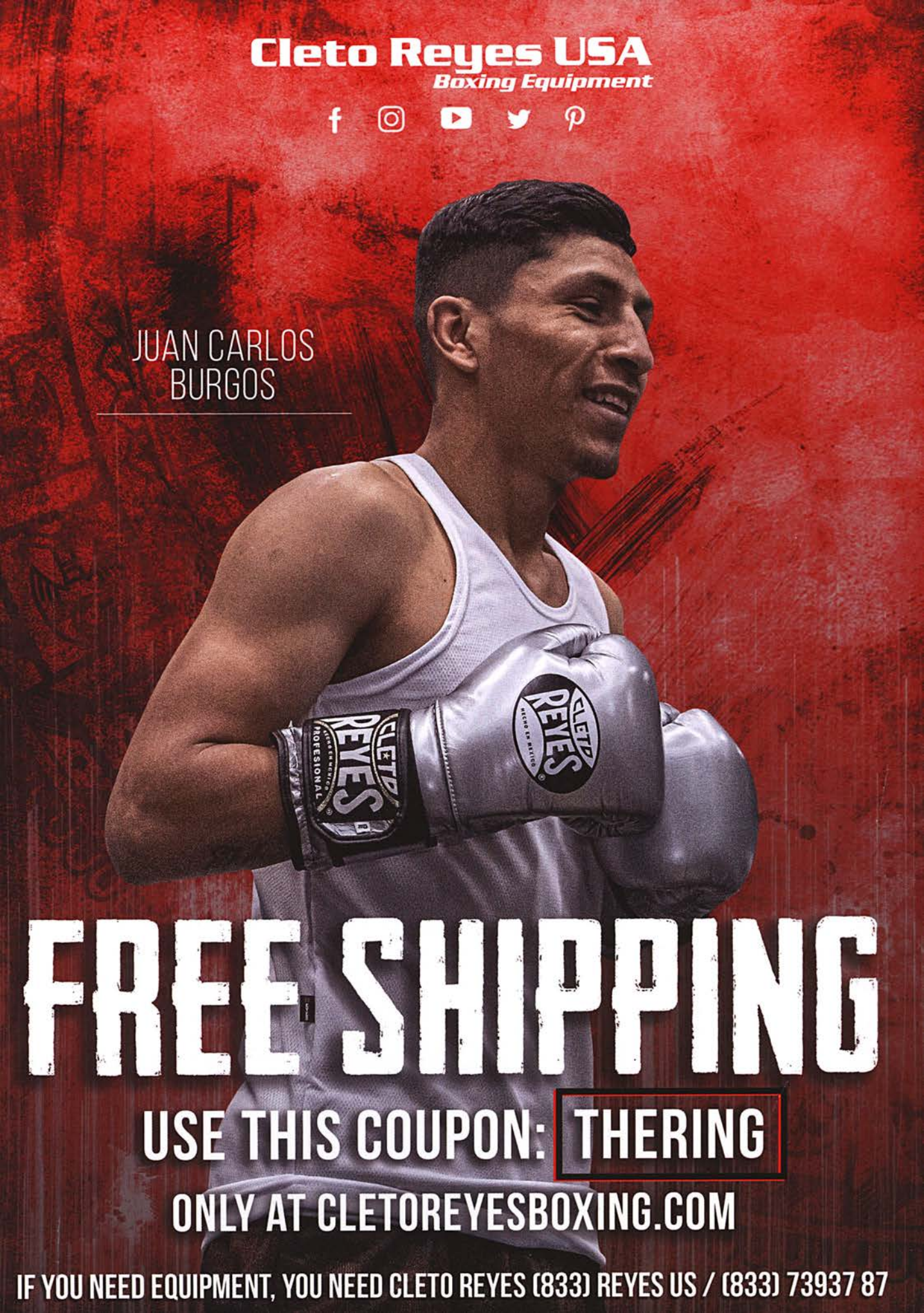

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